

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19561251

# SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON TERTIARY EFL STUDENTS' ORAL PROFICIENCY: A CASE STUDY FROM THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT MULAWARMAN UNIVERSITY

Dian Anggriyani<sup>1</sup>, Abidin<sup>1</sup>, Fathu Rahman<sup>1</sup>, Harlinah Sahib<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hasanuddin University, Indonesia. Email: fathu.rahman@unhas.ac.id

Received: 21/01/2026

Accepted: 25/03/2026

---

## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to uncover the main sociocultural factors influencing the speaking proficiency of third-semester students in the English Education Department at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mulawarman University, Samarinda. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research provides an in-depth analysis of how various sociocultural elements such as gender, family background, socioeconomic status, exposure to English outside the classroom, social interaction, and engagement with native speakers contribute to students' speaking abilities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and a speaking proficiency test, and were analyzed using content analysis. Participants were purposively selected and consisted of third-semester students who had completed three consecutive English Speaking courses (Speaking 1, 2, and 3), totaling 98 students from three parallel classes. The findings reveal that these sociocultural factors play a significant role in shaping students' confidence, fluency, and responsiveness to instructional materials. Students with strong family support, access to English-language media, and meaningful social interactions demonstrated greater improvement in their speaking performance. This research offers a comprehensive overview of how sociocultural dynamics influence the development of English speaking skills in higher education settings.*

---

**KEYWORDS:** EFL Students, Oral Proficiency, Sociocultural Influences.

---

## 1. INTRODUCCION

English as a foreign language aims to provide the learners with sufficient communicative plus literacy skills to enable them to undertake further education in a foreign country (Starovoyt et al., 2020). However, gaining proficiency in English to the required level can be challenging in practice, because English is not used as an official language in the student's country; the students are only exposed to English at school during instruction where English is needed as a part of the subject matter and it is comparatively rare to find the English language in use outside classrooms (Ramanayaka, 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2025; Asha et al., 2025). This situation often leads to inadequate practice, making it hard for EFL learners in Indonesia to attain oral language proficiency.

English has become an international or global language that is used and spoken by many people worldwide today, as it is the acknowledged lingua franca across many wide-ranging areas such as politics, diplomacy, science, technology, business, international trade and industry, commerce, education, media, information technology and popular culture (Kawakibi & Indrawan, 2024). Therefore, in many fields the learning of English becomes a primarily skill that needs to be developed to complement field-specific competencies. Communicative competence refers to mastering English language skills essential to support and drive transformative development within governmental and academic spheres, where proficiency in communicative English is a fundamental requirement (Shaik, 2024).

It is evident that, in order to achieve a high level of competence in the use of any language as a means of communication, it is essential for the speaker to have a working knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of the language. This knowledge enables the speaker to use the language in a way that is appropriate to the context and purpose at hand, so that he/she can be deemed to communicate effectively as needed. However, achieving this communicative competence is often challenging for foreign language learners. In this context, speaking is an essential aspect of the language since it determines how well people understand each other (Pickering & Garrod, 2021). When considering the importance of proficiency in English speaking, arguably everyone needs to attain a sufficient degree of fluency in English to be able to compete globally and interact with the outside world; therefore, English is seen as a unifying tool, and English language skills play an important role in life, especially in education (Haryadi & Aminuddin,

2023).

This case study on English as a foreign language (EFL) was conducted in the English Department of Mulawarman University in Samarinda City, East Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. In this department, English Speaking is a mandatory subject in the first, second, third, and fourth semesters of undergraduate courses. The primary researcher has personal experience as a lecturer teaching English Speaking at all four levels (Speaking 1 to 4), and has observed that student performance in the Speaking classes varies considerably from high to low proficiency. This is an interesting and challenging phenomenon, since all students are given the same course materials, instructions, treatment, and teaching strategies, as they are taught based on a standardized lesson plan. This plan was carefully compiled with reference to the standard competencies required of students in the tertiary level Speaking course syllabus under the Indonesian education system. In addition, all students were studying in the same place and even in the same classroom. This raises the question of why the output (student speaking proficiency) differs to such an extent when the input (everything given in the speaking class such as course materials, instruction, treatment, teaching strategy) was the same for all students, and in particular what factors influence the outcome in terms of improving student oral proficiency in English.

In this context, it is important to investigate sociocultural factors, including how aspects of English speaking skills are influenced by factors such as social distance, cultural confrontation, sociolinguistic background, and the socio-economic backgrounds of EFL students (Kakita & Palukuri, 2021; Abbas et al., 2024; Nursaadah et al., 2025). Sociocultural theory takes a universal view regarding the act of learning. In the field of second language learning (SLL) research, sociocultural theorist Vygotsky (1962) stated that sociocultural theories have extensively referred to language which arises from cultural and social activity; only later is it reconstructed as an individual, psychological phenomenon (Tzuriel, 2021).

When adopting this way of thinking, SLL theory should not be centered so much on the process of learning new structures and sounds and then using them to communicate, but rather on the learner's participation in social activities such as having out of class conversations or talking to classmates and teachers (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). In addition, sociocultural theory as developed by Vygotsky (1962) provides a valuable framework that emphasizes the importance of social interaction,

cultural context, and language in cognitive development. At its core, the sociocultural theory posits that learning takes place through social interactions within a specific cultural and linguistic environment. Furthermore, the theory emphasizes that language is not simply a means of communication, but a tool that shapes our thinking and understanding of the world (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007).

Sociocultural factors that can influence EFL learners' speaking proficiency are many and varied. They include gender, age, personality (extroversion and introversion), home environment (family support, relationship with parents and siblings), multicultural environments, multilingual environments, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, linguistic background (the patterns of use of the learner's native language (L1) can interfere with target language (L2) acquisition), socio-economic background (students' parents level of education, occupation, income), interaction with peers, interaction with teachers, interaction with native speakers, internet influence (social media activity), extra inputs such as exposure to English outside the classroom environment (joining an English conversation club or English camp, listening to English songs, watching movies with or without subtitles both in English and student's L1), and stereotyping of EFL learners by society. However, the effects of these factors are poorly studied in general, and in particular in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to address this topic using a case-study approach, investigating the socio-cultural factors that influence the oral English proficiency of EFL learners in the English Department of Mulawarman University in Samarinda.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of a wide range of sociocultural factors that are often underexplored in prior studies. While prior research has focused on isolated aspects such as gender or socio-economic status, this study integrates multiple dimensions, including personality traits (extroversion and introversion), multicultural and multilingual environments, social media interaction, and exposure to English outside the classroom, alongside factors that are often considered such as family environment and socio-economic background. Furthermore, the localized focus on EFL students at Mulawarman University adds another layer of novelty, focusing on these sociocultural dynamics within a specific institutional and cultural setting, potentially offering insights that are both contextually relevant and applicable to broader

educational frameworks.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. *Studies on Factors Affecting EFL Students' Speaking Proficiency*

Exposure to the Target Language (TL) is a critical factor in achieving proficiency in a second language (L2). Among the numerous factors influencing L2 learning, language exposure—both formal and informal—plays a pivotal role (Al-Zoubi, 2018). The study by Vy et al. (2024) employs content analysis as a central method for analyzing qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews. This approach was systematically used to transcribe and categorize the responses of six students and four instructors, focusing on their perceptions of English-speaking fluency and strategies for its improvement. This research identified task repetition as the most effective strategy for enhancing fluency. Notably, the study revealed a discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of speaking fluency, which may impede the achievement of fluent speech. These findings provide a foundation for discussing pedagogical strategies to support both teachers and students in developing fluency. Additionally, the analysis uncovered nuanced factors influencing fluency, such as the interaction of linguistic, affective, and performance-related elements. For instance, while students prioritized affective factors like motivation and confidence, instructors emphasized linguistic aspects such as vocabulary and pronunciation, highlighting differing perspectives.

### 2.2. *Neo-Vygotskian Theory*

Sociocultural theory, also referred to as neo-Vygotskian theory, is rooted in Russian cultural psychology and has become a foundational framework in understanding second language development. It emphasizes that human cognition and learning are deeply influenced by social and cultural contexts (Leon, 2023). The Neo-Vygotskian theory is an extension of Vygotsky's original learning theory, emphasizing the importance of social interaction in an individual's cognitive development. According to Lev Vygotsky, cognitive processes such as thinking and understanding develop through social interaction structured within a cultural and linguistic context (Vygotsky, 1978; Crain, 2011). In this theory, cognitive tools and language play a critical role as mediators that enhance learning and development (Williams, 2016). One of the central concepts in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what an individual can achieve independently and

what they can achieve with the assistance of others, such as a teacher or peer (Vygotsky, 1978; Leon, 2023).

### **2.3. Social Constructivism Theory**

Social constructivism theory, influenced primarily by the works of Lev Vygotsky and further developed by scholars like Jerome Bruner and Barbara Rogoff, posits that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction and cultural experiences. This theory emphasizes that learning is not a passive process but rather an active one, where individuals build their understanding of the world through engagement with others, particularly in social contexts. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD is central to social constructivism (Zajda, 2023). According to Vygotsky, learners are capable of performing tasks with the help of more knowledgeable others, such as teachers or peers. The learning process occurs first at a social level (intermental) before being internalized (intra-mental). Vygotsky's theory stresses the importance of language and culture in shaping cognitive development, where language serves as the primary tool for transmitting knowledge and mediating cognitive processes (Belolutsckaya et al., 2022).

### **2.4. Socio-economic Background of English Learners**

Avendaño, Calderón, and Meléndez (2019) state that learning a foreign language or a second language involves the social background of the learners while learning a foreign language because learning occurs in a variety of contexts. The impact of context on learning a language is considerable because the learning environments will enable individuals to learn how to learn and to develop as fully integrated learners. Learner's access to different cultural goods or cultural capital such as internet, computers, pictures, paintings, books and dictionaries and social capital such as learners' relationships with teachers, parents, siblings, and peers may have a profound influence upon whether, what and how any individual learns a language (Williams and Burden, 1997 as quoted by Pishghdam 2011).

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Design**

The research design of the present study is structured as a descriptive qualitative design, aimed at investigating and describing the key sociocultural factors that influence the speaking proficiency of third-semester students. The study focuses on

identifying these factors and examining their impact on students' speaking skills, exploring both the positive and negative effects. This design allows for an in-depth understanding of how sociocultural elements shape students' language use, interactions, and overall proficiency in speaking, without attempting to manipulate or control the variables involved. The goal is to provide a comprehensive description of the sociocultural dynamics at play in the context of language learning.

### **3.2. Research Participants**

The sample used in this research comprised third-semester students from the English Department at the Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Mulawarman University during the 2023/2024 academic year. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a method that selects individuals based on specific characteristics that align with the study's objectives. The inclusion criteria required participants to have completed three consecutive Speaking Courses: Intensive Speaking, Intermediate Speaking, and Upper Intermediate Speaking. The 98 third-semester students were divided into three classes (Class A, Class B, and Class C).

### **3.3. Interviews**

The main instrument for data collection was a series of semi-structured interviews. The questions posed during the interviews were designed by the researcher and were checked and validated by experts in the field prior to the study. Each interview was conducted by appointment with the interviewee. The interview questions were posed in English but the participants were allowed to answer in English or Indonesian. This allowed the participants to express their feelings and opinions more directly, increasing the quality of the data received. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data obtained were then analyzed using a content analysis approach.

### **3.4. Observation**

Observation was conducted during three meetings in each of the three parallel Speaking classes. The lead researcher was a passive observer, and did not interact with the participants during the lessons. The researcher focused on observing the students' speaking proficiency during the lesson and how they perceived the teaching materials given and strategies implemented by the Speaking class lecturer. The aim was to obtain supporting or additional data through direct observation, in

particular to provide context and to gain a more comprehensive view of the students' performance and their response to the materials and the teaching strategy.

### 3.5. *Speaking Proficiency Test*

To gather data on students' speaking proficiency (numerical scores), the lead researcher administered a speaking proficiency test to all third-semester students from the three parallel Speaking classes. After completing the test, the researcher collected the students' scores and selected the students with the highest and lowest scores to participate in the interview. The speaking proficiency test was designed by the researcher and employed a face-to-face interview format between the student and the researcher. The tasks for the speaking test were selected based on the RPS (Rencana Pembelajaran Semester) or Semester Lesson Plan for the Speaking 3 course (Upper Intermediate Speaking). The test consisted of two tasks: 1) expressing likes and dislikes, and 2) giving an opinion about a controversial issue. Each student was given five minutes to speak on each task, allowing the researcher to assess the students' speaking skills in terms of fluency, coherence, and the ability to express opinions. To gather primary data, all 98 students took a speaking proficiency test. From this, the researcher selected the students with the highest and lowest speaking proficiency. A total of 12 students were selected for interview, comprising four students from each class: one male and one female with the highest scores, and one male and one female with the lowest scores.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to uncover the main sociocultural factors influencing the speaking proficiency of third-semester students in the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, at Mulawarman University, Samarinda. By focusing on students who had completed three Speaking course levels (Speaking 1, Speaking 2, and Speaking 3), this research also validates the extent to which these sociocultural factors contributed to positive and/or negative outcomes in terms of their speaking proficiency.

### 4.1. *Main Sociocultural Factors Influencing Third Semester Students' Speaking Proficiency*

#### 1. *Sociocultural Factors*

The main sociocultural factors affecting the third-semester students' speaking proficiency at the

English Education Department of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mulawarman University Samarinda were: Gender, Family Background, Socio-economic Background, Exposure to English Outside the Classroom, Social Interaction in Language Learning, Interaction with native speakers, Role of teachers and lecturers, and Personality. These factors, combined with formal instruction in the Speaking courses (Speaking 1, Speaking 2, and Speaking 3), influenced the speaking proficiency of the 98 third-semester students who participated in the research.

#### a. *Gender*

Both male and female participants demonstrated a range of confidence levels and perceived speaking proficiency. While some individuals expressed high levels of confidence, others exhibited anxieties and concerns about their abilities, particularly regarding vocabulary and fluency. Factors that appear to positively influence speaking proficiency and confidence include exposure to English from a young age. For example, Najwa, who grew up speaking English at home, demonstrated a high level of confidence and fluency. Similarly, Rif'an, who attended an Islamic boarding school where English was the primary language for extended periods, also exhibited strong speaking skills and confidence.

Consistent practice and interaction also play a significant role. Those who actively engaged in regular English conversations with friends, family, or online communities tended to report higher confidence and demonstrate greater fluency. For instance, Rif'an practiced English daily with friends in online platforms and during social gatherings. Belva's participation in "English hour" sessions with friends also contributed to her speaking practice. Additionally, supportive learning environments, such as encouragement from family and friends, can greatly enhance language development. Belva mentions her father's efforts to converse in English with her, while Ika acknowledges the helpful feedback she receives from friends to identify areas for improvement.

The utilization of diverse learning resources also stands out. Participants made use of movies, music, video games, and online platforms like YouTube and TikTok to improve their speaking skills. Cakra valued watching movies and listening to music, while Fayyaz benefited from English subtitles in video games and educational content on social media. However, common challenges and anxieties persist. Many participants, both male and female, cited a lack of vocabulary as a significant obstacle to

fluent speaking, often leading to feelings of anxiety and hesitation during conversations. The fear of making mistakes, including grammatical errors or mispronunciations, also impacts confidence levels and can hinder active participation and practice. Furthermore, some participants, particularly those in environments where English is not commonly spoken, faced difficulties finding regular opportunities to practice with proficient speakers.

Regarding potential gender differences, subtle variations emerge in how male and female participants perceive and approach speaking challenges. While both genders expressed confidence and anxieties, some female participants, like Belva and Fitriyani, seemed more prone to openly acknowledge their anxieties and fears about making mistakes. On the other hand, some male participants, like Cakra and Rif'an, tended to emphasize their confidence levels, even when acknowledging areas for improvement. This difference could be influenced by gender-based societal expectations and norms surrounding the expression of confidence. Additionally, there appears to be a divergence in how male and female participants prioritize speaking aspects. Female participants, such as Ika and Charina, focused more on grammatical accuracy and structured sentences, while male participants, including Cakra and Rif'an, prioritized fluency and the effective communication of ideas, even at the expense of perfect grammar. This suggests potential gender-based variations in student approaches to speaking proficiency.

### ***b. Family Background***

Participants who were exposed to English from a young age, particularly within their family environment, exhibited greater confidence and fluency in their speaking abilities. Najwa, whose family incorporates English into daily conversations, demonstrated a high level of comfort and proficiency. This early immersion provided her with a natural and consistent language learning experience, fostering both her vocabulary and fluency. Similarly, Belva also benefited from her father's deliberate efforts to converse with her in English. His background as an English teacher, holding a master's degree in English education, created a supportive learning environment that encouraged her speaking development.

The educational background of parents, particularly their English language proficiency, seems to influence their children's language learning experiences. Rif'an's parents, both teachers, recognize the value of multilingualism and actively

encourage their children's language development. Their decision to send Rif'an to an Islamic boarding school that emphasizes English and Arabic instruction highlights their commitment to fostering language skills. In contrast, participants like Ika and Cahyo, whose parents have limited English proficiency, received less direct language support at home. This absence of regular English interaction might contribute to their anxieties and challenges in developing fluency.

While all participants were university students, variations in socioeconomic status appear to influence access to resources and opportunities for English language development. Najwa's family was able to provide her with a private English tutor during her elementary and junior high school years. This additional support likely played a role in her advanced speaking proficiency. Andi's parents sent him to two different English courses during high school, demonstrating their financial ability to invest in his language education. In contrast, participants like Fitriyani and Yuri, whose families have more limited incomes, said they rely primarily on less structured learning opportunities, such as watching movies or interacting with friends.

The dominant language spoken at home significantly shapes participants' comfort levels and opportunities for English practice. Participants like Najwa and Rif'an, who regularly use English at home, develop a natural fluency and confidence in their speaking abilities. However, for those like Cahyo and Raihan, whose families primarily communicate in Indonesian or their regional dialects, opportunities for English practice are limited to academic settings and interactions with friends.

### ***c. Socio-Economic Background***

The experiences of these 12 participants illustrate how access to resources, cultural capital, and social capital can significantly shape English language learning opportunities and, consequently, speaking proficiency. Participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, like Najwa and Andi, have greater access to financial resources that enable them to hire private tutors, attend English courses, and use technological tools such as laptops and smartphones. These resources provide structured learning environments, personalized instruction, and opportunities for independent practice. In contrast, students with limited financial means, such as Fitriyani and Yuri, often rely on less structured methods like watching movies or interacting with peers, which may hinder their progress.

Technological resources also play a crucial role.

Students like Belva, Fayyaz, and Rif'an use online platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Duolingo to access learning materials, engage with online communities, and practice speaking. These tools offer valuable opportunities for self-directed learning and exposure to diverse accents and communication styles. However, limited access to technology can be a barrier. For instance, Yuri struggled to find time for online learning due to her demanding work schedule. Exposure to English media, such as books, movies, music, and video games, provides informal yet effective learning opportunities. Participants like Cakra, Fayyaz, and Andi noted that watching English-language films and listening to music had a positive influence on their vocabulary and pronunciation. Charina also mentioned benefiting from watching Korean and Japanese series with English subtitles, which expose her to colloquial English.

Family language practices significantly influence students' comfort and confidence in using English. Najwa, for example, grew up in a household where English was part of daily conversations, which fostered her fluency and natural pronunciation. Similarly, Rif'an's parents emphasized multilingualism and sent him to a boarding school prioritizing English and Arabic, which contributed to his strong language skills. Supportive peer networks provide valuable opportunities for practice, feedback, and mutual encouragement. Belva participates in "English hour" sessions with her friends, while Rif'an actively engages in online English-speaking communities, both of which enhance their confidence and fluency.

Relationships with teachers also play a critical role. Positive interactions with teachers who encourage participation, provide constructive feedback, and create supportive learning environments significantly enhance motivation and speaking proficiency. For instance, Belva benefited from her father, an English teacher, regularly conversing with her in English. Rif'an appreciated his speaking lecturer's supportive teaching style, and Ika valued the feedback she receives from friends, which helps her identify areas for improvement.

#### ***d. Exposure to English outside the Classroom***

Engaging in activities like social media interaction, watching English movies, and participating in English clubs provides valuable opportunities for language practice, exposure to different accents, and increased confidence. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram offer a wealth of English language content, including

educational videos, tutorials, and authentic interactions between native speakers. Fayyaz actively seeks out English learning content on these platforms, imitating pronunciation and expanding his vocabulary. Similarly, Raihan utilizes YouTube to find tutorials on improving speaking skills. Social media also facilitates interactive practice, allowing users to engage in conversations with English speakers worldwide.

Charina said she participates in online communities of K-pop fans, using English for communication and casual conversations, while Rif'an actively engages in online platforms, discussing various topics and practicing different language styles. Watching movies offers exposure to authentic language, immersing learners in natural conversations, colloquial expressions, and diverse accents. Cakra, Fayyaz, and Andi highlighted the benefits of English movies on vocabulary and listening comprehension. Charina said she also utilizes English subtitles in Korean and Japanese series to learn everyday expressions. Observing actors also helps with pronunciation and intonation. For instance, Ika mentioned learning different accents by focusing on how characters pronounce words correctly, which aids in developing more natural intonation and rhythm.

English clubs and activities provide structured practice in supportive environments. Belva actively participates in "English hour" sessions with her close friends, dedicating time to focused conversation practice. Rif'an benefits from attending online lessons and engaging in online games with foreign players, which help him use English for communication and problem-solving. Additionally, regular interaction with peers boosts confidence. Yuri noted that her university friend circle, where most members are proficient English speakers, positively influences her speaking abilities. Cakra emphasized the importance of social interaction for improving speaking skills, mentioning that he practices singing English songs with his friends. These activities collectively demonstrate how learning beyond the classroom fosters English speaking proficiency through practical exposure and confidence building.

#### ***e. Social Interaction in Language Learning***

The data from these 12 participants underscores the profound influence that interaction with peers, native English speakers, and instructors can have on speaking development. These interactions, shaped by factors like confidence, motivation, and opportunities for authentic communication, are crucial in fostering fluency, accuracy, and overall

speaking proficiency. Interactions with peers provide a comfortable and supportive setting for practicing English speaking skills without the fear of judgment that might arise when interacting with instructors or native speakers. Participants like Belva and Yuri, who regularly engage in English conversations with their friends, highlighted the role of peer interaction in boosting confidence. Belva's "English hour" sessions with close friends allow for dedicated practice in a relaxed atmosphere, while Yuri finds her friend circle's proficiency in English motivating.

Peers can offer valuable feedback and support, creating a collaborative learning environment. Ika appreciated her friends' willingness to correct her mistakes, while Cakra emphasized the positive impact of mutual support among friends in their shared journey of English language development. Interacting with peers in English simulates real-life communication scenarios, allowing students to practice using the language for a range of purposes. Rif'an said he participates in online platforms where he engages in conversations with friends, discussing various ideas and practicing different language styles, which contributes to his overall speaking proficiency.

While often perceived as intimidating, interactions with native English speakers offer invaluable opportunities to experience authentic language use, diverse accents, and cultural nuances. Exposure to native speakers helps learners refine their pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. Rif'an's interaction with a visitor from Australia during his time at an Islamic boarding school provided him with valuable exposure to authentic spoken English. He also noted that interacting with native speakers in online games helps him refine his pronunciation. Native speakers can provide insights into cultural norms and expressions that enrich language comprehension and usage. Fayyaz emphasized the benefits of observing how native English speakers use language on social media, recognizing the differences in vocabulary and expressions compared to non-native speakers.

Successfully communicating with native speakers can be a significant confidence booster. Najwa described her only interaction with native speakers, assisting them with directions, as a positive experience that likely contributed to her confidence in speaking English. Instructors play a pivotal role in providing structured learning, feedback, and encouragement, shaping students' motivation and confidence in speaking English. Speaking classes offer opportunities for targeted practice and feedback from instructors. Cakra said he appreciates

the structure and interactive activities in his speaking class, which allow him to practice communication skills and receive guidance on areas for improvement. Rif'an values the support and feedback provided by his instructor, which encourages him to express his ideas confidently.

Enthusiastic and supportive instructors can significantly enhance student motivation. Belva credited her father, an English teacher, for fostering her interest in speaking English. Andi aspires to become a lecturer like his speaking instructor, whom he finds inspiring. Instructors who create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere can reduce anxiety and encourage participation. Charina appreciated her speaking instructor's open and encouraging teaching style, which allows students to share their opinions freely.

### *f. Personality*

The data from the 12 participants revealed a nuanced understanding of how personality traits, particularly introversion and extroversion, can influence the development of speaking proficiency. While extroverted learners often demonstrate a natural inclination towards social engagement and risk-taking, which can accelerate their speaking progress, introverted learners may need alternative strategies to nurture their confidence and fluency. For extroverted individuals, speaking a foreign language often becomes an extension of their inherent social drive. They typically embrace opportunities for interaction, actively seeking conversations both within and beyond the classroom. For example, Najwa, who grew up speaking English at home, confidently interacts with peers and eagerly communicates with native speakers. Similarly, Rif'an thrives in social settings and uses English in diverse contexts. His time at an Islamic boarding school, where English was the primary language for communication over extended periods, significantly enhanced his fluency and confidence.

Extroverts also tend to view mistakes as learning opportunities. They are less inhibited by the fear of making errors, perceiving them as a natural part of the learning process. Cakra, for instance, admitted to feeling momentarily surprised and embarrassed by mistakes but said he quickly recovers and actively seeks feedback from friends to improve. Furthermore, extroverted learners often benefit from group activities and public speaking. Their outgoing nature and willingness to take center stage allow them to practice speaking skills and receive immediate feedback. Both Cakra and Rif'an find speaking classes enjoyable and beneficial as they

provide structured opportunities for interaction and improvement.

Introverted learners, while potentially facing initial challenges, can achieve remarkable progress in speaking proficiency with appropriate support and tailored approaches. Confidence-building through safe spaces is one effective strategy. Introverts may feel more comfortable practicing speaking in smaller groups or one-on-one settings. For example, Belva, although she felt confident about her accent, said she feels shy about initiating conversations but actively participates in "English hour" sessions with close friends. Similarly, Yuri said that she benefits from practicing with her close-knit friend circle, where she feels supported and comfortable.

Structured learning and individualized feedback also play a significant role for introverted learners. Ika, for example, uses Instagram to practice her English writing and appreciates the feedback she receives from her friends, which helps her refine her skills. Moreover, tapping into personal interests can motivate introverts in their language-learning journey. Fayyaz leverages his interest in online gaming to expand his vocabulary and practice communication with other players. Likewise, Andi, who enjoys playing video games and reading novels in English, finds these activities contribute to his language development.

## 2. Classroom Observations

The in-class observations, conducted passively over three meetings in three classes (Class A, Class B, and Class C), provided valuable insights into the students' real-world speaking performance within the classroom environment. Each class session showcased a unique learning environment and set of activities, allowing for a multifaceted understanding of student speaking behavior.

1. Class A's meetings were structured around discussions and pair work. The first meeting emphasized open discussion and personal experiences, encouraging students to share opinions and engage in question and answer (Q&A) sessions. Subsequent meetings involved group discussions and presentations, offering students varied platforms to practice their speaking skills.

2. Class B utilized a Socratic seminar format for all three meetings. The focus was on analyzing news articles, requiring students to critically engage with current events and articulate their perspectives. The dynamics of the seminar shifted between student-led and lecturer-guided discussions, providing students with opportunities to both lead and participate.

3. Class C employed a combination of Socratic

seminars and a debate. Early meetings concentrated on educational topics and the impact of technology, emphasizing analytical and persuasive speaking. The final meeting culminated in a formal debate, challenging students to articulate arguments and engage in structured rebuttal.

Below are the results of the observation checklist. The observation followed a structured format to guide observations and record data on a suite of pre-determined topics.

### a. Enthusiasm

Observations across the three classes (A, B, and C) revealed a range of student enthusiasm levels, ranging from eager participation to hesitant silence. Most students demonstrated positive nonverbal cues associated with enthusiasm, including maintaining eye contact, displaying pleasant facial expressions, using gestures, and engaging in body movements. Word selection and vocal delivery also served as indicators of enthusiasm. Students, especially those with higher speaking scores, often used highly descriptive language, a variety of adjectives, and displayed excited, varied speech with lilting intonation. They were generally responsive to questions and comments, providing quick and engaged answers.

However, a subset of students, particularly those with lower speaking scores, showed a contrasting pattern of behavior. They frequently displayed shyness, hesitation, and a tendency to remain silent, often bowing their heads and avoiding eye contact. Their vocal delivery tended to be quiet and hesitant. In some instances, despite encouragement from the lecturer, these students remained completely silent, underscoring their apprehension regarding speaking in English. The varying levels of enthusiasm observed across individuals and classes underscore the complexity of language learning and the influence of factors such as confidence, personality, and speaking proficiency. While many students embraced the speaking opportunities with genuine interest and eagerness, others found the experience more challenging, revealing their anxieties and inhibitions.

### b. Speaking Skill Performance

Observations across all three classes (A, B, and C) revealed a spectrum of speaking skill performance, with notable variations in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. Students with higher speaking scores generally exhibited greater fluency, characterized by smooth and fluid speech, minimal hesitation, and a lack of noticeable word

searching. Their communication was generally effective, allowing them to convey their ideas and complete tasks successfully. Their pronunciation was often described as excellent, with minimal L1 accent interference. They also demonstrated a strong command of vocabulary, employing a diverse range of words and expressions appropriately.

Conversely, students with lower speaking scores often struggled with various aspects of speaking skill performance. They exhibited less fluency, frequently marked by halting speech, hesitations, and visible attempts to search for words. Grammatical errors and mistakes in pronunciation were also more prevalent in their speech. Their speech was sometimes hard to understand due to mispronunciation and a stronger influence of their L1 accent. The vocabulary they used was comparatively limited, lacking the range and precision demonstrated by their higher-scoring peers. These observations highlight a clear correlation between overall speaking proficiency and the individual components of speaking skill performance. Fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary use appeared to be interconnected, with students demonstrating strength in one area often exhibiting competence in others. This underscores the importance of addressing all aspects of speaking skill development in English language instruction to foster well-rounded communication abilities.

### *c. Psychological Factors*

Observations across the three classes (A, B, and C) provided insights into the psychological factors influencing students' speaking performance, revealing a spectrum of confidence levels, anxieties, and willingness to communicate in English. Many students, particularly those with higher speaking scores, exhibited clear signs of confidence and comfort while speaking English. They appeared brave, readily volunteered to participate, and spoke without noticeable hesitation. Their body language often conveyed self-assurance, marked by upright posture, direct eye contact, and a relaxed demeanor. They actively engaged in discussions, confidently expressing their opinions, and readily responded to questions and comments.

In contrast, a subset of students, predominantly those with lower speaking scores, displayed visible signs of anxiety and a reluctance to communicate. They often appeared shy, hesitant, and fearful of speaking in front of their peers and the lecturer. Their body language often reflected their apprehension, characterized by avoiding eye contact, bowing their heads, and exhibiting nervous gestures. They were

less likely to volunteer, often remaining silent even when called upon, and their speech, when they did speak, was frequently quiet, hesitant, and marked by frequent pauses and fillers.

These observations suggest a strong correlation between psychological factors and speaking performance. Students who exhibited confidence and comfort generally demonstrated greater fluency, accuracy, and a willingness to actively participate in speaking activities. Conversely, students struggling with anxiety and fear often exhibited more hesitant and less fluent speech, and their reluctance to communicate limited their opportunities for practice and improvement. These findings underscore the importance of creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment that fosters confidence and reduces anxiety to facilitate effective speaking skill development.

### *d. Pedagogical Aspects*

Observations across the three classes (A, B, and C) revealed that the teaching materials and strategies employed by the instructor were generally effective in promoting speaking skills, fostering student engagement, and facilitating active learning. The instructor utilized a diverse range of activities, including discussions centered around personal experiences, current events, and educational topics, Socratic seminars focused on critical analysis and in-depth exploration of news articles, pair work that allowed for more personalized interaction and practice, and a formal debate that provided a structured platform for argumentation and rebuttal. These varied activities provided students with ample opportunities to practice their speaking skills in different contexts and develop different aspects of their speaking proficiency, such as fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary usage.

The instructor also played an active role in guiding student learning and improvement through clear instructions and explanations that ensured students understood the tasks and expectations, encouragement and motivation that fostered confidence and a willingness to participate, walking around the classroom during activities to observe and provide individual support, and offering constructive feedback and evaluation focused on grammar, pronunciation, and idea development. This helped students identify areas for improvement.

Specific instances of effective pedagogical practices observed include the instructor's facilitation of a smooth transition between individual sharing and paired discussions in Class A, encouraging active participation and idea exchange. In Class B, the

instructor skillfully guided a Socratic seminar despite a student moderator who was not very active, ensuring the discussion progressed and students remained engaged. In Class C, the instructor provided clear explanations and simulations for the debate activity, addressing student confusion and equipping them with the necessary skills and strategies. However, some challenges were also observed. In some cases, students struggled to follow instructions or deviated from the intended task, suggesting a need for clearer guidelines or closer monitoring. The effectiveness of the activities sometimes depended on student moderators, highlighting the importance of training and preparing students for leadership roles. Overall, the observations suggest that the instructor's proactive approach, varied teaching strategies, and focus on student engagement contributed positively to the learning environment and promoted speaking skill development.

#### *e. RPS Content Analysis*

The analysis of the Speaking 3 course syllabus, called the Semester Lesson Plan (SLP), or Rencana Pembelajaran Semester (RPS), at Mulawarman University's English Department is crucial for understanding how the curriculum integrates elements of sociocultural awareness and its potential influence on students' speaking proficiency. The SLP provides a structured framework for the Speaking 3 (Upper Intermediate Speaking) course, outlining the objectives, content, and teaching strategies.

The SLP for the Speaking 3 course aims to develop students' ability to speak English at the intermediate and pre-advanced levels, covering topics such as promoting products, public speaking, making presentations, and news reporting. Analyzing the course description reveals the specific speaking skills and contexts that the course emphasizes. The analysis will focus on whether the description acknowledges the role of sociocultural factors in speaking proficiency and whether it suggests sensitivity to diverse communication styles or cultural backgrounds. The SLP outlines the learning objectives that students are expected to achieve by the end of the course. These objectives include responding to interview questions, applying oral communication strategies for promoting products, speaking in forums, conducting interviews, and reporting news.

Analyzing these objectives will help determine whether the course aims to develop sociocultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. The SLP for Speaking 3 does not explicitly address

sociocultural factors in speaking proficiency. However, certain aspects of the curriculum and student experiences suggest potential areas where sociocultural influences might be at play, contributing to observed patterns of student performance. One potential area of sociocultural influence is opportunities for interaction with native speakers. These are likely to be limited in the formal class context, as the SLP for Speaking 3 curriculum does not explicitly mention interactions with native English speakers as part of the course requirements.

Some students, like Rif'an, seek out such interactions through online games, as a way to overcome the lack of a structured approach within the curriculum that could limit opportunities for students to gain exposure to authentic language use and cultural nuances, potentially hindering their speaking development. Another potential area is the focus on classroom-based English. Najwa's observation that the materials in RPS are "too classroom-based" and need to incorporate more "natural" language used in everyday settings raises the question of whether the curriculum adequately prepares students for real-world oral communication scenarios. This potential disconnect between classroom English and the language used in authentic social contexts could contribute to students feeling less confident or struggling to apply their speaking skills outside the academic setting.

Additionally, the curriculum's heavy reliance on individual assessments, such as presentations and impromptu speaking tasks, might not fully address the sociocultural dimensions of communication, which often emphasize collaborative and interactive language use. The focus on individual performance could inadvertently contribute to anxiety and hinder the development of fluency for some students, particularly those who are more introverted or less comfortable with public speaking. To better understand the curriculum's potential role in shaping student performance, one suggestion is to explicitly incorporate sociocultural elements into the curriculum. This could include discussions on cultural norms and communication styles in English-speaking countries, activities that simulate real-world communication scenarios, and opportunities for collaborative tasks that promote interaction and peer learning.

Another recommendation is to facilitate interactions with native speakers. This could involve inviting guest speakers to the class, organizing language exchange programs with native speakers, or leveraging online platforms to connect students with native English speakers for conversation

practice. Additionally, addressing individual learning styles and needs is important. This could include offering a variety of assessment methods to cater to different strengths and comfort levels, providing opportunities for both individual and group work to support introverted and extroverted learners alike, and creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages risk-taking and reduces anxiety. By incorporating a more explicit focus on sociocultural factors, the Speaking 3 curriculum could better equip students with the necessary skills and confidence to navigate diverse communication contexts effectively, ultimately contributing to more students attaining well-rounded speaking proficiency.

The SLP includes activities like Socratic seminars, interviews, and parliamentary debates, which inherently involve interactive communication and negotiation of meaning among participants. These activities, if implemented effectively, could create a space for students to engage with diverse perspectives and adapt their communication styles accordingly, fostering a degree of sociocultural awareness. Furthermore, the curriculum encompasses various speaking tasks, including expressing likes and dislikes, qualifying and clarifying opinions, and engaging in controversial discussions. This exposure to a range of contexts could potentially encourage students to consider how language use varies depending on the social situation and audience, promoting a more nuanced understanding of sociocultural factors in communication.

However, there are potential limitations and areas for enhancement. The SLP does not provide specific examples of how to incorporate culturally diverse materials or directly address issues of intercultural communication. The absence of such elements could limit students' opportunities to develop sensitivity to different communication styles and cultural norms, potentially hindering their ability to effectively communicate with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the SLP's focus on "classroom-based English" might not adequately prepare students for real-world communication scenarios where sociocultural influences play a significant role. Without sufficient exposure to authentic language use and the nuances of intercultural communication, students may struggle to apply their speaking skills effectively in diverse social contexts.

While the SLP outlines various speaking tasks, it does not elaborate on the specific criteria used to assess student performance. It is essential to consider

whether the assessment methods adequately account for the influence of students' backgrounds on their speaking proficiency. For instance, if the assessment heavily prioritizes native-like pronunciation or fluency without considering the challenges faced by learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, it could inadvertently disadvantage certain students.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that multiple sociocultural factors significantly influence the speaking proficiency of third-semester students in the English Education Department at Mulawarman University. These include gender, family background, socio-economic status, exposure to English outside the classroom, social interaction, and engagement with native speakers.

Gender differences manifest in students' confidence and speaking priorities, with females often more focused on grammatical accuracy and more open about language anxieties, while males tend to prioritize fluency and self-assurance. Family background, particularly early exposure to English and the educational level of parents, plays a vital role in shaping students' confidence and competence. Respondents with family support and a home environment conducive to English use demonstrated higher levels of fluency and confidence. Socio-economic status further impacts access to resources such as private tutors, language courses, and technology, which in turn influence students' opportunities for structured learning and self-directed practice.

Exposure to English beyond the classroom, including through social media, movies, online communities, and English clubs, provides students with authentic contexts to practice and enhance their speaking abilities.

Participants who actively engage with English-language media or join interactive platforms displayed greater oral English competence in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Social interactions with peers and native speakers, though varying in frequency and context, are equally influential in reinforcing language use performance and building communicative confidence.

Peer collaboration allows students to practice without fear of judgment, receive feedback, and develop real-life communication skills, while interaction with native speakers provides exposure to natural speech patterns and cultural nuances. Ultimately, these interconnected sociocultural factors, together with formal instruction, contribute to the diverse speaking proficiency levels observed

among the students.

## REFERENCES

- Abbas, H., Arafah, B., Rahman, F., Pattu, M. A., Junus, F. G., Fachry, M. E., ... & Manaf, A. (2024). Ecological Literacy and Local Wisdom of Australian Aboriginal People in Welcome to My Country Written by Laklak Burarrwanga and Family. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies (TPLS)*, 14(5).
- Al-Zoubi, S. M. (2018). The impact of exposure to English language on the English language acquisition. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 5(4), 151-162.
- Asha, A. J., Rahman, F., Amir, P. M., & Abbas, H. (2025). Atticus Finch's Societal Changes and the Racial Dynamics of Southern America: A Comparative Study of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15(1), 254-261.
- Avendaño, B., Calderón, D., & Meléndez, M. (2019). Sociocultural factors influencing English language learning in Ecuadorian higher education. *English Language Teaching*, 12(5), 63-74. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n5p63>
- Belolutskaya, A., Troitskaya, Y., & Gromova, E. (2022). Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition: A reconsideration of Vygotsky in the modern context. *Journal of Language and Education*, 8(3), 59-69. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2022.13355>
- Crain, W. (2011). *Theories of development: Concepts and applications* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Haryadi, & Aminuddin, M. (2023). The role of English proficiency in shaping global competence among university students. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 34-42.
- Kaharuddin, Rahman, F., Hasjim, M., & Abas, A. (2025). The vowel structure of Proto-Makassar: A phonological reconstruction of five dialects. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 16(3), 880-888.
- Kakita, P., & Palukuri, P. (2021). Sociocultural dimensions and their impact on EFL speaking proficiency: A study among university students. *International Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, 4(1), 56-71.
- Kawakibi, N., & Indrawan, R. (2024). English as a global language: Bridging communication and culture in a multilingual world. *Global Language Journal*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2007). Sociocultural theory and second language learning. In B. VanPatten & J. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 201-224). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Leon, F. (2023). Neo-Vygotskian approaches in second language acquisition research: An overview. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 17(1), 22-39.
- NurSaadah, S., Rahman, F., Hasyim, M., Arsyad, D., & Bandung, A. T. (2025). Cultural identity and the To Lotang belief system in *Sajak Rindu: Lontara Cinta dari Sidenreng: A literary anthropology perspective*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15(5), 1626-1634.
- Pickering, M. J., & Garrod, S. (2021). *Understanding dialogue: Language use and social interaction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pishghadam, R. (2011). Cultural and social capital in language learning: A sociological perspective. *Iranian EFL Journal*, 7(2), 36-61.
- Ramanayaka, H. (2023). Challenges in attaining English proficiency among EFL learners in non-English speaking countries. *Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 8(3), 112-126.
- Shaik, A. (2024). Communicative competence as a catalyst for academic and governmental transformation in EFL contexts. *International Journal of English Language and Communication*, 9(2), 88-99.
- Starovoyt, I., Zhang, L., & Wang, Y. (2020). English for academic purposes: Enhancing communicative and literacy skills for global education. *International Journal of EFL Research*, 12(4), 45-59.
- Tzuriel, D. (2021). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the mediation of learning in second language acquisition. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 20(1), 11-27.
- Vy, T. T. H., Nguyen, Q. P., & Phan, T. T. (2024). Teacher and student perceptions of speaking fluency and strategies for improvement: A content analysis study. *Language Education Research*, 3(1), 45-60. <https://doi.org/10.1234/ler.2024.30104>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language* (E. Hanfmann & G. Vakar, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 1934)
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

- Williams, M. (2016). Sociocultural theory in education: An overview. *Educational Review*, 68(1), 1–14.
- Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zajda, J. (2023). *Globalisation and education reforms: Sociocultural perspectives*. Springer.