DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH OF SECOND-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF PHAN THIET

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Abstract: *This study investigates the challenges faced by second-year English major students at University of Phan Thiet (UPT) in speaking English. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected through questionnaires administered to 80 students across two classes. The findings reveal that students face significant linguistic and psychological barriers to their speaking development. Linguistic difficulties include challenges in vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, and pronunciation accuracy, while psychological barriers primarily involve issues related to self-confidence and anxiety. In light of these findings, the study recommends incorporating more interactive and communicative activities both inside and outside the classroom to help students overcome these obstacles and enhance their speaking proficiency.*

Keywords: *linguistic challenges, psychological barriers, second-year English major students, speaking skills, University of Phan Thiet*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the ultimate goal of language learning, which is to assist learners in succeeding in their respective fields (Rao, 2019), thus making speaking the most critical skill among the mentioned language skills. For humans, communication is essential to existence. Language is a tool for engaging with people and using words to express ideas, opinions, and feelings. As such, communication occurs through the use of language (Riadil, 2020). In the era of globalization, learning a language is essential for improving one's ability to communicate with others. English is a particularly useful language for this purpose. English allows people to interact with others from all over the world easily, so people should strive to develop proficiency in it (Riadil, 2020). The focus of foreign language education for students is always harmonious with meeting the development and integration goals of the country. In light of the importance of English education in Vietnam, the government has approved the Foreign Language Project 2020. Within the Project 2020 policy, communicative approaches have been compiled into the language curriculum to develop and strengthen students' communicative competence. Briefly speaking, mastering speaking skills is a priority for most learners, and Vietnamese students learning English are no exception.

Previous studies have explored the difficulties in speaking skills in various contexts (Tram, 2020; Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Maji et al., 2022; Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023), but only a few have deeply examined English major students in the Vietnamese context. Among Vietnamese universities, Unversity of Phan Thiet (UPT) offers an interesting case to study because of its relative youth and emerging English program. Unlike many well-established universities in Vietnam, UPT as a non-metropolitan institution, has students with little exposure to an English-speaking environment outside their academic classes. Moreover, the availability of language-learning resources, such as extracurricular activities, English clubs, and native-speaking instructors, may be more limited compared to larger

universities. Another significant challenge is the psychological barrier many students face; they may lack confidence in speaking English due to limited practice and fear of making mistakes. Investigating the challenges UPT's English-major students face in speaking English provides valuable insights into language learning in smaller, developing institutions in Vietnam. This scarcity of research on UPT students' difficulties in speaking English highlights the need for further investigation. In alignment with this aim, a qualitative case study was conducted to explore the research question, "What are the difficulties of second-year English-major students speaking English at University of Phan Thiet?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Key Concepts

2.1.1 Communicative Competence

According to Chomsky (2014), communicative competence (CC) is the ability to understand and apply the social and functional rules of language in communication. Hymes (1992) defines CC as the aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts. According to Savignon (2018), CC depends on everyone's cooperation and is relative rather than absolute. In line with this, Paulston (1974) explains that CC comprises both linguistic competence, which pertains to language forms, and focuses on functional and interactive communication. While linguistic competence is the understanding of language forms, the ability to communicate functionally and interactively is known as "CC". The term encompasses understanding grammar rules, vocabulary usage, pronunciation accuracy, and the skill to communicate appropriately within diverse cultural contexts. Drawing on the

aforementioned features of CC, speaking is a crucial skill for oral communication, conversation, and describing ideas. It involves producing, receiving, and processing information (Florez, 1999) and is a productive skill that allows participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and needs (Brown, 2004).

While these foundational theories provide a strong conceptual basis, they often focus on broad linguistic contexts rather than addressing the specific difficulties faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in Vietnam. Previous studies have primarily examined communicative competence in well-established academic institutions with ample exposure to English-speaking environments. However, limited research has explored how students at non-metropolitan universities with fewer language-learning resources, such as UPT, navigate communicative challenges. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the real-world linguistic and psychological barriers encountered by second-year English-major students, thereby offering a more context-specific understanding of CC.

2.1.2 Speaking Skills

Speaking is one of the most important skills in English, complementing all other language abilities. Throughout the long history of investigating the English language and its related components, there are several definitions of the concept of speaking skills. Initially, speaking is simply defined as saying words orally, communicating by talking, making a request, and making a speech (Nunan, 1995). Then, Chaney and Burk (1998) elaborates on the definition, stating that it involves the creation and sharing of meaning through the use of nonverbal symbols in various contexts. Speaking skills are defined by Andryani (2012) as the ability to communicate with

others in the target language, and it includes accuracy, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehensibility. As for both Widdowson (1990) and Brown (2001), speaking skills involve both of the two aspects: form and meaning, as not only the use of the right sounds in the right patterns (or sequence) of rhythm and intonation but also the choice of words and inflections in the right order to convey the right meaning. Agreed with this view of speaking as an interactive and collaborative process, all defined speaking as a two-way process including the presence and communication of two or more persons in the same shared time and context to express their thoughts, information, ideas, and feelings with each other (Eckard & Kearny, 1981; Florez, 1999; Howarth, 2001; and Torky, 2006). According to Brown (2004a), speaking is a productive skill that is directly and empirically observable. However, the validity and reliability of an oral production test are inevitably compromised because the accuracy and efficacy of a test-taker's listening skills always influence those observations. Students can express their thoughts and emotions through spoken communication. Based on the aforementioned characteristics, speaking skills in this study are defined as the ability to effectively convey information, ideas, and emotions through verbal communication. This definition includes not only linguistic accuracy and fluency but also the speaker's ability to engage and connect with their audience.

Despite extensive research on speaking skills, many studies have primarily focused on fluency and interaction in communicative settings rather than on the specific struggles of EFL learners in academic environments. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the linguistic and psychological barriers that hinder students' speaking proficiency, particularly in a context where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing pedagogical strategies that enhance students' speaking performance and overall CC.

2.2 Importance of Speaking Skills

According to Richard (2008), speaking is a linguistic ability that is learned during childhood and is derived from listening comprehension. It is evident that language is a means of communication where there is speech. This definition highlights the importance of verbal interaction in the communication process. The definition highlights the role of language as a key component in conveying messages effectively. Without speaking ability, a language remains limited to its written form. Therefore, proficiency in speaking is crucial for effective communication. Speaking is considered the most crucial skill because, among listening, reading, and writing, human interaction primarily occurs through spoken communication. Brown (1983) support this concept, emphasizes that students are often evaluated based on their speaking abilities in real-life situations. Enhancing speaking skills assists students in forming connections and expressing ideas effectively. It also contributes to their success in personal and professional spheres. Research conducted by Yudcovitch and Hayes (2014) indicates that students who engage actively in class discussions and presentations generally achieve better academic results. Therefore, cultivating proficient speaking abilities is crucial for students to thrive academically and professionally. Speaking is defined by Hayriye (2006) as choosing words and sentences that fit the appropriate social context, audience, circumstance, and subject matter. Being a fluent speaker requires much knowledge of the

language learned and its usage in real communication. Nunan & Richard (1990) assert that a person's ability to converse in the target language. As suggested by Torky (2006), speaking enhances vocabulary and grammar, which leads to an improvement in writing skills.

Although existing research underscores the importance of speaking skills for academic and professional success, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of how specific linguistic and psychological difficulties impact students' ability to communicate effectively. Many studies have examined general speaking challenges but have not sufficiently addressed the unique struggles faced by students at universities with fewer opportunities for real-life English exposure. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the factors that hinder English-major students at UPT from developing their speaking proficiency, and thus contributing to context-specific language education strategies.

2.3 Difficulties of Speaking English

According to Harmer (2007) and Leong & Ahmadi (2017), two distinctive speaking features are necessary for fluent oral production. These include understanding language elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, which are essential for fluent oral output. The second essential feature involves quickly understanding and responding to information in social interactions and mental tasks. These two features work together to allow speakers to communicate effectively and efficiently in real-time situations. The absence of either of these components can result in interruptions, errors, or a lack of coherence in spoken language, such as hesitations or inaccuracies. Drawing on the aforementioned issues of learning speaking skills, the difficulties in speaking

English, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and self-confidence have been extensively discussed in the literature. According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are significant factors contributing to poor academic performance. Students face speaking difficulties because of their shortcomings in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Similarly, Brown (2001) identifies the causes of the issue: clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, intonation, and interaction. Teachers need to evaluate the learners' speaking competence to select an effective teaching process.

EFL learners' speaking performance is assessed by conducting a speaking ability test. By assessing and discovering to what degree the learners are skilled in speaking, teachers can identify the difficulties the learners face in speaking.

While these studies provide valuable insights into speaking challenges, they do not sufficiently address how linguistic and psychological difficulties interact in shaping students' oral performance. Additionally, the majority of research has focused on urban or highly resourced academic settings, leaving the experiences of students in smaller, developing universities remain unexplored. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining both linguistic and psychological barriers in a non-metropolitan Vietnamese university context, offering practical implications for curriculum design and teaching methodologies.

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2.3.1 Vocabulary

In language learning, vocabulary refers to the words and phrases that a person knows and uses in a particular language. According to Khan et al. (2018), the lack of vocabulary impedes the second language learning process and reduces learners' confidence in using the target language. Many language learners frequently struggle with retrieving and using appropriate words during conversation. Hosni's (2014) research reveals that students encounter difficulties in selecting the right vocabulary items while speaking English, leading to communication barriers. They often hesitate due to uncertainty about word choice, which leads to communication breakdowns. While English language learners may have a clear idea of their intended message, the cognitive process of translating thoughts from their native language into English poses a significant challenge. The struggle to communicate effectively due to inadequate vocabulary is a common hurdle language learners face.

While previous studies have acknowledged vocabulary limitations as a challenge, they do not extensively examine how this issue manifests in students with restricted exposure to English outside the classroom. This study aims to contribute by analyzing how vocabulary-related difficulties affect students' speaking proficiency at UPT, where opportunities for language immersion are limited.

2.3.2 Grammar

One of the most important components of learning the English language is grammar. English learners need to master grammar to engage in conversations effectively. Learning grammar helps learners construct sentences correctly, convey their thoughts clearly, and understand the nuances of the language. Regularly practicing grammar is vital for English language learners to improve their communication abilities, yet many students struggle with applying grammatical rules in spoken discourse. Effendi et al. (2017) stated that simply studying grammar extensively in college does not ensure that language learners will be able to use grammar accurately in their sentences. They still faced difficulty using grammar. Thus, becoming proficient in grammar takes a lot of time for learners.

However, much of the existing research on grammar difficulties has focused on written language proficiency, rather than the specific grammatical challenges students face in spontaneous spoken interactions. This study addresses this gap by investigating the real-time grammatical struggles students encounter while speaking English, providing insights into how educators can support them more effectively.

2.3.3 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way to produce sounds. It involves using vocal cords, mouth, and tongue to create specific sounds that form words and sentences. Mastering pronunciation can greatly improve communication skills and overall language fluency. Learning pronunciation is challenging due to phonetic differences between their native language and English, even though they may seem insignificant. Research indicates that only a few learners achieve pronunciation similar to that of a native speaker (O'Brien, 2004; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Levis et al., 2016; Almusharraf, 2022). Many learners tend to use the pronunciation rules of their native language when pronouncing English words.

While these studies highlight pronunciation difficulties, they often focus on broad theoretical frameworks rather than analyzing pronunciation challenges in specific learning contexts. This research contributes by examining how pronunciation issues hinder communication

among Vietnamese English-major students at UPT, where exposure to native English speakers is limited.

2.3.4 Psychology

Additional psychological barriers, such as nervousness, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes, can hinder students from becoming proficient English speakers. These factors affect linguistic expression and influence students' willingness to participate in oral communication. According to Wulandari et al. (2022), psychological problems can significantly impact emotional and physical well-being, relationships, work performance, and overall life adjustment, exemplified by feelings of nervousness, lack of self-confidence, and fear of speaking (Arifin, 2017). It is important for language learners to address these psychological barriers in order to improve their English proficiency and overall confidence.

Despite these insights, there is a need for further research on how psychological barriers interact with linguistic difficulties in shaping students' speaking performance. By addressing both aspects, this study provides a holistic perspective on the challenges faced by English-major students at UPT, ultimately informing more effective pedagogical strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

To investigate the difficulties of English-major students speaking English, this study adopted a quantitative study as a research framework guiding its process of designing and implementing the research (Cresswell, 2014; Queirós et al., 2017; Yin, 2018) to obtain in-depth and detailed understanding of the students' authentic experience in the learning speaking process.

3.1 Participants

The study focuses on finding the challenges of speaking English of 80 second-year English major students of 2 classes at UPT. The participants were purposefully sampled to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Criteria for selection included that students must have completed a minimum of one year of university-level English classes, suggesting they had some foundational proficiency in the language. Although they had extensive language experience in this specific context, the participants generally showed low levels of speaking proficiency that made them ideal candidates for studying the specific challenges of communicating orally in English. In this context, the sampling method was used to include broad students who shared similar problems in speaking English; therefore, increasing the applicability of the study in similar academic environments. This study will further investigate the specific challenges faced by these students when speaking English. The student participants were well informed of the research's aims and data collection plan and voluntarily participated in the study by answering questionnaires.

Based on academic course (completion of foundational language programs), homogeneity of instruction (identical curriculum and teaching methodologies across classes), and practical accessibility (institutional approval and participant consent), the study chose two intact second-year English major classes at University of Phan Thiet (UPT). Ideally, researchers use cluster randomization—randomly picking classes from a pool of all second-year cohorts instead of convenience sampling—to guarantee representativeness. Before random assignment, stratified sampling could balance demographic or academic subgroups—e.g., gender, prior performance—for increased rigor. Although the study's reliance on intact groups was pragmatically justifiable given institutional restrictions, precise documentation of

randomization techniques—or limits thereto—would improve methodological transparency.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

This study utilized questionnaires as the major data collection tool to investigate students' difficulties in speaking English. The questionnaire consisted of four key items, each addressing a specific challenge in oral communication:

Grammar: "I find it difficult to construct grammatical structures when speaking English."

Pronunciation: "Pronunciation problems directly impair my speaking ability."

Vocabulary: "I struggle to convey my message effectively due to a limited vocabulary."

Psychological Factors: "Psychological issues (e.g., low confidence, anxiety) interfere with my ability to speak."

The survey aimed to identify students' common problems while learning to speak through four focused questions. Each item was designed to assess a distinct aspect of speaking difficulties commonly faced by students. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) as shown in Table 1. The structured questionnaire aimed to systematically identify the most prevalent challenges students encounter in spoken English.

Table 1. Five-degree Likert questionnaire

1-Strongly Disagree   2-Disagree   3-Neutral   4-Agre   5-Strongly Agree

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1. It is difficult to make grammatical structures when I speak English.					
2. Pronunciation problems directly impair my speaking ability.					
3. I have not successfully transferred my message to listeners because of my lack of vocabulary.					
4. Psychological problems (ex: low confidence and anxiety) interfere with my ability to speak.					

A four-item questionnaire was distributed to 80 participants. To measure the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire, the coefficient of reliability, Cronbach's alpha, was calculated. The Cronbach's alpha value is .739, as shown in Table 2. According to Peterson (1994), this coefficient shows that the scale satisfies the reliability requirement.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.739	4

Participants were required to choose the response that most accurately represented their views on the four survey questions (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Analysis of the survey data revealed four main themes: vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, pronunciation accuracy, and psychological issues.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Grammar Comprehension

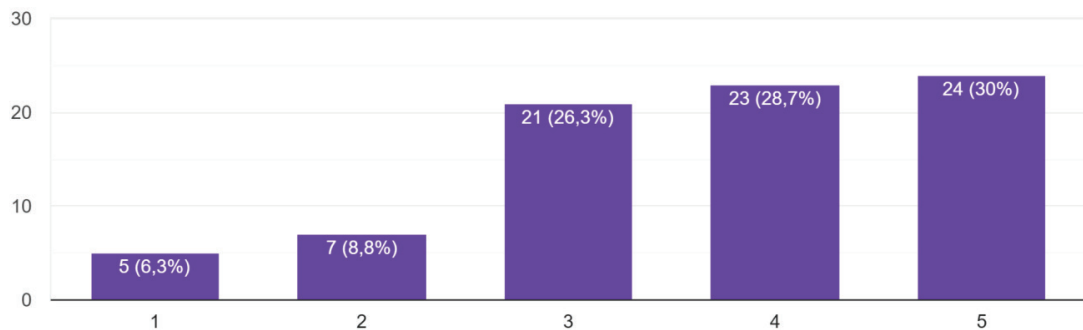1. It is difficult to make grammatical structures when I speak English. (Tôi gặp khó khăn trong việc tạo ra các cấu trúc ngữ pháp khi nói tiếng Anh.)

80 câu trả lời

Figure 1. The results of difficulty in grammar

Figure 1 clearly shows that there is strong agreement regarding the negative impact of over-focusing on grammar while speaking English. 15.1% strongly disagree or disagree that the overemphasis on grammar has no impact. The 26.3% neutral group indicates that some participants are unsure or do not consider the excessive focus on grammar during speech to be a significant issue.

On the other hand, 58.7% of respondents agreed that excessive focus on grammar is detrimental to their English-speaking ability, while a further 30% strongly agreed with this as a significant issue. It implies that the majority of the participants think that overemphasis on grammar can reduce spontaneity and fluency in speaking English. These results are consistent with Effendi et al. (2017), who argued that extensive grammar study does not guarantee accurate usage in communication, as learners often struggle with applying grammatical rules effectively. Furthermore, Brown (2004b) noted that performance variables, including hesitations due to grammar concerns, can disrupt fluency. Thus, these survey results suggest that we must combine teaching grammar while speaking and communicating in English because setting an overly high standard when it comes to grammar can prevent students from simply having a conversation or feeling confident enough to speak.

67

4.2 Pronunciation Accuracy

2. Pronunciation problems directly impair my speaking ability. (Vấn đề phát âm ảnh hưởng trực tiếp đến khả năng nói của tôi.)
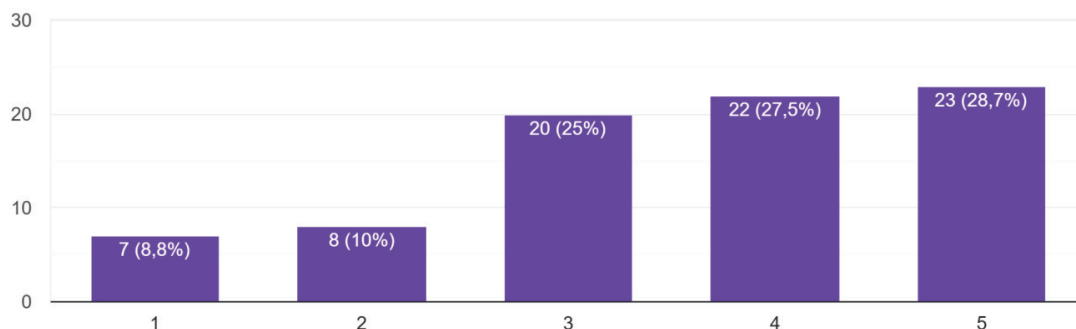
80 câu trả lời

Figure 2. The results of difficulty in pronunciation

The chart reveals a strong consensus about the challenges that pronunciation difficulties pose when speaking English. It was 18.8% of respondents who said they fully disagreed or disagreed with the statement. The 25% labeled neutral showcases that part of participants that are still left untouched - they may not care either way, or they might not prioritize pronunciation challenges as an element of their speaking experience. Nevertheless, most of the respondents (56.2%) agreed that because they have some pronunciation difficulties, their English can be clear or not, and 28.7% strongly agree it contributes to influence as a communication nut-gap too troublesome tool. This implies that most of the participants are aware that difficulties in pronunciation affect their communication and confidence in speaking English. These findings are in line with O'Brien (2004) and Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011), who found that pronunciation is a major barrier to effective communication, with only a few learners achieving native-like pronunciation. Additionally, Almusharraf (2022) highlighted that learners often apply the pronunciation rules of their native language, leading to persistent errors. In sum, these survey results show that pronunciation should be a primary focus in language learning, as it is ultimately the most important aspect of being understood and feeling confident when speaking.

4.3 Vocabulary Acquisition

3. I have not successfully transferred my message because of my lack of vocabulary. (Tôi không thể truyền đạt thông điệp của mình một cách hiệu quả do thiếu từ vựng.)
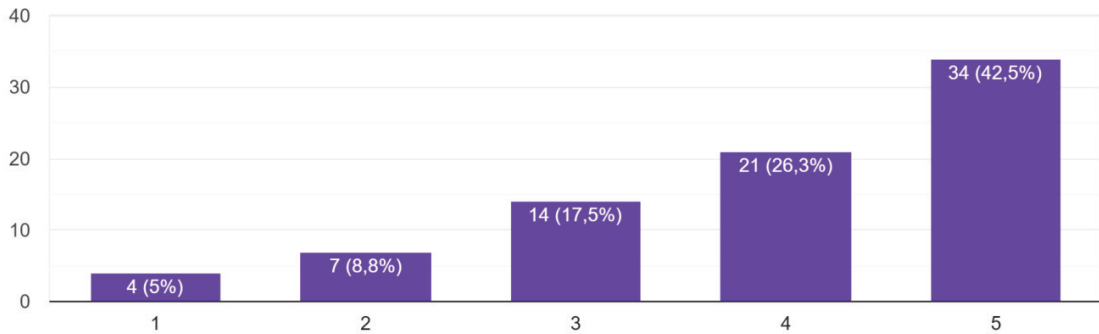
80 câu trả lời

Figure 3. The results of lacking in vocabulary

Figure 3 illustrates that there is a strong consensus among survey participants regarding the impact of having a limited vocabulary. In fact, it was around 13.8% who either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that having a limited vocabulary has no effect, which means nobody is in denial about this one. The neutral group (17.5%) indicates that a small portion of those surveyed either cannot see the negative impact of limited vocabulary or are apathetic to the problem. Nonetheless, 68.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a lack of vocabulary does impede their choice to communicate and/or learn, and 42.5% of participants confirmed that this is, indeed, a very serious problem. This means that a majority acknowledge the significance of vocabulary and the hindrances it provides in comprehension and the imparting of meaning. These findings align with the literature, as Khan et al. (2018) emphasized that a lack of vocabulary hinders second language learning and reduces learners' confidence in using the target language. Similarly, Hosni (2014) found that vocabulary limitations cause communication breakdowns, making it difficult for learners to select appropriate words in conversation. In sum, survey results indicate that most educators believe limited vocabulary negatively impacts student learning and communication, and more attention needs to be paid to providing students with opportunities to build their vocabularies.

4.4 Psychological Problems

4. Psychological problems (ex: low confidence; and anxiety) interfere with my ability to speak. (Các vấn đề tâm lý (ví dụ: thiếu tự tin hoặc lo âu) làm ảnh hưởng đến khả năng nói của tôi.)
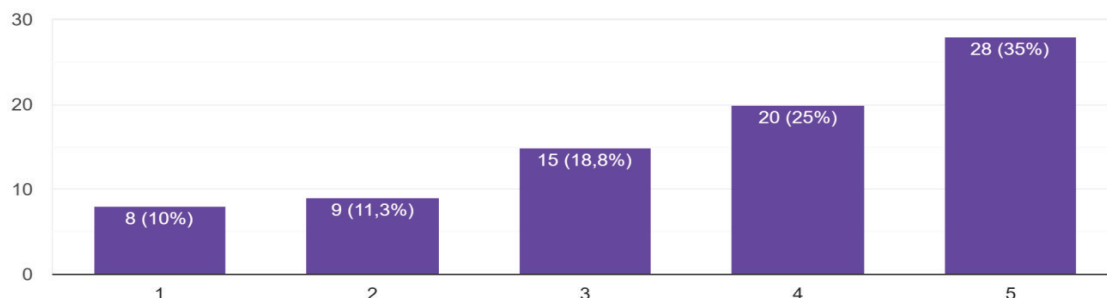80 câu trả lời

Figure 4. The results of psychological problems

The chart indicates that the majority of respondents recognize psychological issues related to speaking English. Notably, 21.3% of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, indicating that nobody denies this (this is not farther down into the middle as we find for some other statements). The 18.8% neutral group is a considerable part of respondents who either do not feel forceful about the psychological issues they suffer whilst speaking English or have never gone through them directly. Nonetheless, one-fourth (25%) of respondents agreed with the statement, and 35% strongly agreed their psychological issues are a key roadblock to communicating well. It indicates that the majority of participants recognize barriers of a mental nature that prevent them from speaking English well, especially in terms of fear of committing mistakes or being ashamed. These findings align with previous research by Arifin (2017), who highlighted that nervousness and fear of speaking hinder learners' ability to engage in conversations. Similarly, Wulandari et al. (2022) found that psychological barriers significantly influence students' emotional and physical well-being, ultimately affecting their performance in speaking tasks. To summarise, the survey results suggest that one of the most important aspects to work on in language learning is psychological because these challenges, such as anxiety and lack of confidence, can play a huge role in speaking ability in particular and communication skills overall.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the challenges that English major students face in speaking English, particularly in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, pronunciation accuracy, and psychological barriers. Through the analysis of survey data from 80 students, the study highlights the complex nature of language learning and underscores the importance of addressing both cognitive and psychological factors that contribute to students' speaking difficulties. The results align with earlier studies by Harmer (2007) and Leong & Ahmadi (2017), which highlight the importance of proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure for English learners. Moreover, psychological factors like

nervousness and lack of confidence also play an important part in students speaking performance. According to Riadil (2020), losing confidence is an immense barrier that can occur while learning a language. Most students are afraid and insecure when speaking English because they cannot freely express their thoughts. Their lack of confidence in their English speaking skills, their belief that they are poor speakers, and their fear that they cannot express their ideas in class are barriers.

The findings of this study confirm that English-major students encounter significant obstacles in developing effective speaking skills despite their exposure to English as a foreign language for over a year. The study summarizes the main difficulties as follows.

5.1.1 Vocabulary Acquisition

The study revealed that a majority of participants reported that limited vocabulary is a key obstacle to effective communication. The inability to retrieve appropriate words and phrases during conversations often leads to hesitation and reduced fluency. Such behavior highlights the crucial role of vocabulary in the speaking process, as students' ability to express themselves is directly tied to their vocabulary knowledge. Without a sufficiently broad vocabulary, students struggle to convey their ideas clearly, which can result in a lack of confidence and increased anxiety during communication.

5.1.2 Grammar Comprehension

While grammar knowledge is foundational to language learning, the study found that an overemphasis on grammatical accuracy during speaking negatively impacts students' fluency and spontaneity. Many students expressed concerns about making grammatical mistakes while speaking, which in turn inhibited their ability to engage in fluid conversation. The pressure to speak perfectly can result in students focusing excessively on structure rather than meaning, thereby diminishing their overall communicative competence. This argument suggests that grammar instruction should be integrated into communicative activities to encourage the use of grammar in context rather than in isolation.

5.1.3 Pronunciation Accuracy

The issue of pronunciation emerged as another significant challenge for students. The majority of participants acknowledged that their pronunciation difficulties affected their ability to be understood and reduced their confidence in speaking. Even though pronunciation may not always be considered a priority in traditional language instruction, the findings suggest that it plays a crucial role in facilitating effective communication. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings and hinder the clarity of speech, making it essential to prioritize pronunciation instruction alongside other language skills.

5.1.4 Psychological Barriers

Psychological factors, including anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence, were recognized by a majority of participants as barriers to effective speaking. Many students reported that the fear of being judged or making errors in front of others inhibited their ability to speak freely. These psychological issues are particularly significant in language learning, as they can prevent students from fully engaging in the speaking process. Addressing these barriers is crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages risk-taking and active participation.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance EFL students' speaking abilities.

5.2.1 Emphasize Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary acquisition should be a focal point in language instruction. Teachers should incorporate diverse and dynamic vocabulary-building strategies, such as context-based learning, word association exercises, and interactive tasks that encourage students to use new vocabulary in real-life situations. It is essential to provide students with opportunities to encounter and use words in meaningful contexts, as this will enable them to internalize vocabulary more effectively and improve their speaking fluency.

5.2.2 Integrate Grammar Instruction into Communicative Activities

While grammar is fundamental to language proficiency, it should not be taught in isolation, particularly when the goal is to develop speaking skills. Instead, grammar instruction should be seamlessly integrated into communicative activities that promote fluency and spontaneity. Teachers should create opportunities for students to practice grammar in context, such as role-plays, debates, and discussions, where they can apply grammatical rules while focusing on communication rather than perfection. This approach will reduce the pressure on students to speak grammatically perfect sentences and allow them to prioritize meaning and communication.

5.2.3 Focus on Pronunciation

Pronunciation should be given more attention in language classrooms. Effective pronunciation is critical for clear communication, and students should be provided with targeted pronunciation exercises to improve their articulation, stress, intonation, and rhythm. Additionally, technology such as speech recognition tools and online pronunciation platforms can be incorporated to give students immediate feedback and allow them to monitor their progress. By fostering awareness of pronunciation issues and providing ample opportunities for practice, students will feel more confident in their ability to be understood.

5.2.4 Provide Psychological Support and Foster a Supportive Learning Environment

One of the most significant findings of this study is the role of psychological barriers in language learning. To address these challenges, it is essential for language programs to create a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes and taking risks in their speaking. Teachers should encourage a growth mindset, where errors are considered natural steps in the learning process, rather than something to be feared. Activities that build confidence, such as small group discussions, peer feedback, and public speaking opportunities, can help reduce anxiety and empower students to speak more freely. Additionally, offering counseling or stress-management workshops may help students cope with the psychological aspects of language learning.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, it has several limitations. The relatively small sample size and reliance on self-reported data may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the sample size and employ a combination of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and classroom observations, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges students face in speaking English. Longitudinal studies could also track students' progress over time to examine how their difficulties evolve as they gain more proficiency in the language.

Furthermore, in the future, researchers could look into how well specific

interventions work at solving the problems that have been identified, like programs that help you learn new words, speaking activities that include grammar, or tools that help you improve your pronunciation. Investigating the role of emotional intelligence and self-regulated learning strategies in overcoming psychological barriers may also provide valuable insights into how to better support students in their language learning journey.

In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of the difficulties faced by English-major students in speaking English. To improve speaking proficiency, it is crucial to address not only the cognitive aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, but also the psychological barriers that inhibit students' communication skills. By adopting a more holistic and integrated approach to language instruction that balances language skills development with psychological support, educators can create a more conducive learning environment that empowers students to overcome challenges and become confident, effective communicators in English.

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Note:

The author declares no competing interests.

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NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN TRONG VIỆC NÓI TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ HAI CHUYÊN NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC PHAN THIẾT

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này khảo sát những thách thức mà sinh viên năm thứ hai chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Phan Thiết (UPT) gặp phải trong việc nói tiếng Anh. Sử dụng phương pháp định lượng, dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bảng hỏi được thực hiện với 80 sinh viên thuộc hai lớp học. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên gặp phải những rào cản ngôn ngữ và tâm lý đáng kể trong việc phát triển kỹ năng nói. Những khó khăn ngôn ngữ bao gồm việc tiếp thu từ vựng, hiểu ngữ pháp và độ chính xác trong phát âm, trong khi các rào cản tâm lý chủ yếu liên quan đến vấn đề tự tin và lo âu. Dựa trên kết quả này, nghiên cứu đề xuất việc tích hợp nhiều hoạt động giao tiếp và tương tác hơn cả trong và ngoài lớp học để giúp sinh viên vượt qua các rào cản này và nâng cao khả năng nói tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: Đại học Phan Thiết, kỹ năng nói, rào cản tâm lý, sinh viên năm thứ hai chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh, thách thức ngôn ngữ

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Ghi chú:

Tác giả xác nhận không có tranh chấp về lợi ích đối với bài báo này.