

Transitioning from Silence to Confidence: A Study of Non-Native English-Speaking Students in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformation of students from silent to confident English speakers, aiming to understand the underlying factors that contribute to this change. Many English learners struggle with speaking due to a combination of psychological, linguistic, and environmental challenges. This research investigates the reasons behind students' initial shyness in speaking English, the specific difficulties they encounter—such as limited vocabulary, grammatical issues, and stage fright—and how they manage to overcome these barriers. It also examines the tension between maintaining native language proficiency while acquiring English fluency. The study was conducted using qualitative methods, with data collected through online interviews via Google Meet. Findings indicate that students develop confidence and fluency by adopting strategies tailored to their personal interests and social contexts, including listening to music, watching videos, and practicing with peers. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of learner agency in language development and provide practical implications for English language education.

Keywords: *English Speaking; Language Anxiety; Linguistic Demands; Self-Confidence; Speaking Skills***Article History:**Received 28th February 2025Accepted 15th April 2025Published 19th April 2025

INTRODUCTION

Considering that English Language is a lingua franca (Assassi & Ghodbane, 2023), it's a necessity to learn how to speak English to ease the communication process (Arroba & Acosta, 2021; Göktürk et al., 2020) and navigate our way through many international activities such as international business, studies, scientific activities (Iman, 2017; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018), technology, industry, entertainment, and others (Iman, 2017). There are a lot of countries recognizing English as the language of unity and they are implementing a lot of ways for their citizens to learn how to speak English (Dewi et al., 2016). Because of its ability to spread quickly and high versatility, English is becoming a universal language of education (Crystal, 2003) and science (Mukminatien, 2012) which can be vital for our society in the future (Spolsky, 2004).

The study is organized to reveal about how the language learners transform themselves from a shy language learner to an active language learner and overcome challenges they face during their language learning journey, especially in English-speaking context, speaking is one of the most difficult skills to master (Bueno & McLaren, 2006) for it requires the language learners to have a sufficient self-confidence, linguistic skills, and knowledge to be able to speak English fluently (Al Hosni, 2014; Riyaz & Mullick, 2016).

Speaking is a way of communicating a meaning using verbal methods which as a result, it makes enunciated sounds and words in which the ideas, thoughts and feelings of someone are

communicated (Chaney & Burk, 1998). In essence, speaking is a language skill that requires the learner to verbally communicate the language with two or more people. It is the most sought out skills for us to deliver our thoughts, communicate with people, or even learn new things (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Kusmaryani et al., 2019; Rao, 2019). Although some skills are required to master in English, namely reading, speaking, listening, and writing, speaking is sitting at the foremost important part. Therefore, most English learners dream of having good mastery of English speaking so they can have an easier time communicating with people abroad and reach their dreams of working abroad (Rao, 2019). To strengthen this statement further, speaking is the likeliest skill to use after listening, reading, and lastly writing, for speaking skills were naturally developed through imitation. It is best to develop English skills in a family environment (Guvey & Mermi, 2022).

However, not many people can fluently communicate in English. This problem is mostly caused by language-speaking anxiety when people are trying to communicate in English as mentioned by the study conducted by (Tsai, 2018) which states that foreign language anxiety is nearly related to foreign language learning. Adding more information, (Diehl et al., 2019) in their study has mentioned that anxiety is commonly perceived as a negative emotion consisting of state and traits.

When investigating the speaking journeys of non-native English students, the concept of language anxiety is critical to understanding the silence in which many have experienced it in academic settings. The researcher has identified and summarized three main causes of language anxiety from a journal by Azmi Randu Farhani, Yuditha Natalia Binsasi, and Armitha Handayani. They have stated that language anxiety can be caused by insufficient vocabulary learning, tedious grammar teaching, and the fear of unwanted reactions (Farhani et al., 2020). One major issue is insufficient vocabulary learning. (Katemba, 2021) emphasizes that vocabulary is the foundation of language learning, as students who lack vocabulary mastery struggle to speak, write, read, or comprehend language, both in everyday communication and digital spaces. Despite the critical role vocabulary plays, Indonesia's English proficiency ranks 79th out of 113 countries globally and 13th out of 23 in Asia, according to a survey conducted by English First. This low ranking indicates that many Indonesian students face difficulties in mastering English-speaking skills. Another challenge is the way grammar is taught. (Gesa et al., 2023) discovered that traditional grammar instruction methods, which often rely on memorization and a presentation- practice-production approach, continue to dominate classrooms. These methods involve teaching grammar points explicitly, followed by repetitive drills and exercises, which making the learning progress feel tedious yet disengaging for the learners. Additionally, the fear of unwanted reactions is a significant contributor to foreign language anxiety, especially when students are learning to speak. (Krashen, 1982) describes speaking anxiety as part of the affective filter, which includes psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety which could affect the learner's capability to master a foreign language. Furthermore, (Kralova & Tírpakova, 2019) found that variables like age, time spent in English-speaking countries, and time spent practicing English influence how learners perceive anxiety. Older learners tend to experience more anxiety, whereas younger learners are generally less anxious about speaking English.

Furthermore, for many non-native students, oral presentations or classroom discussions feel like high-stakes scenarios, further elevating their anxiety. (Horwitz et al., 1986) framework highlights how language anxiety creates an affective filter that inhibits language learning and speaking performance. As these students progress in their academic careers, overcoming these anxieties becomes critical to their journey toward speaking confidence. By addressing these emotional barriers and developing strategies to lower anxiety, educators can facilitate the transition from silence to confident participation in academic discourse. Understanding language

anxiety through this lens allows for a deeper exploration of the psychological obstacles non-native English students face. It offers valuable insights into how they might overcome these challenges to become more confident speakers.

While the researcher made this research, the researcher had saw that most of the journal which talks about speaking skills in the last four years tends to be revolving around the level of speaking skills knowledge of school teachers (Göçmez & Ünal, 2024), using various methods to improve speaking skills (Dennis, 2024; Nguyen & Tran, 2024), or even developing a speaking class curriculum (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Although there is speaking research that talked about language anxiety (Fauzi & Asi, 2025), this is only talks about one factor out of many struggles in the journey to the sufficient English-speaking mastery. This research is deserved to be conducted because most of the times people get hesitant to communicate in English although they understand what the word means, and it's one of many signs of foreign language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety can be described as “a compilations of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning progress which comes from a learner’s progress of language learning” (Horwitz et al., 1986). The research of language anxiety is also relevant to various things and conditions such as gender, age, motivation, employment situation, and in this context of this research, foreign language speaking (Bárkányi, 2021). Although most of the learners had experience FLA while they hone their speaking skills, that also is one of the beauty and interesting things to happen in the language learning process.

Given the aforementioned statements, problems, and goals related to achieving speaking mastery, this study seeks to explore several key questions: What are the main challenges that non-native English-speaking students face when participating in oral communication within university settings? How do these students navigate the delicate balance between preserving their native language identity and developing proficiency in English speaking? Furthermore, how does the transformation from silence to confidence influence their academic performance and social integration? Driven by a deep curiosity, the researcher aims to uncover how these learners overcome their challenges and progress toward the language mastery they strive to attain.

Literature Review

Self Efficacy

Language learners frequently encounter emotional challenges, especially in the context of speaking a foreign language. (Krashen, 1982) has stated that one of the most common issues is foreign language anxiety (FLA), which can significantly reduce their communication capability. Anxiety stems from a fear of making mistakes, being judged by others, or facing negative reactions in social or academic settings. This anxiety can create a mental block, preventing students from fully engaging in speaking activities or expressing themselves confidently. (Horwitz et al., 1986) has observed that speaking anxiety could decrease a learners’ motivation and will to take part in oral communication, creating a cycle of avoidance that further impairs their progress in mastering speaking skills. To minimize the fear of students while learning English it requires a need to build self-efficacy to start the journey of improving speaking skills. Self-efficacy is also known as “believing in self-capability to arrange and perform any kinds of actions needed to achieve the desired results” (Bandura, 1977). It also can be defined as the main discussion of social-cognitive theory. (Bandura, 1997) further states that self-efficacy can prevent someone from mental troubles such as fear, depression, and self-depreciation. Other researchers have further demonstrated that self-efficacy can be considered as a powerful initiator of job completion (Mills, 2014), language understanding (Kissling et al., 2015) and can be a performance enhancer (Apridayani & Teo, 2021; Leeming, 2017; P. Swanson, 2014; P. B. Swanson, 2012, 2013).

Bandura also discovered that people with sufficient self-efficacy are most likely to carry out their daily tasks and routines, while people with insufficient self-efficacy are most likely to have little to no confidence and they're most likely to trap in their own feelings, believing that difficult tasks are undoable (Bandura, 1977). (Buadas et al., 2017) discovers that self-efficacy can be evaluated by how well the students are adapted at every process of learning while they self-evaluate their own performance and using their own creative strategies. In speaking context, if learners don't have self-confidence, they are most likely to have low willingness to communicate, caused by their fear of the negative results that might come to them while they communicate (Manipuspika, 2018). (Lee & Lee, 2020) also state, students with a higher confidence had an advanced level of language and communication mastery, including in cyberspace, where learners can explore diverse topics. Self-efficacy can also highly contribute to academic performance. As stated by (Tridinanti, 2018) who shows how self-efficacy correlates with verbal communication performance. Thus, if students could improve their self-efficacy, they can gradually increase confidence and performance, while their self-deprecating tendencies and anxiety to perform is starting to decrease constantly.

Speaking Mastery

Snell and Hornby have stated that speaking is the act of communicating about anything, having a conversation with anybody, greeting some people, and any other activities related to speaking such as giving an opinion, commanding someone, et cetera (Snell-Hornby, 2009). Meanwhile Moore also defines speaking as the ability to fluently explain and communicate a school of thoughts as well as an act of expressing oneself depending on the circumstances, reporting events, and perceiving scenarios in an appropriate language (Moore, 2013). To put it simply, speaking, is the way to communicate and explain what things you perceive, events you experience, and thoughts you consider. Conclusively, speaking is the most important skills to have in our daily lives. There are a lot of researchers (Nation, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Schmitt, 2010) who have found out that vocabulary is among the most necessary language learning aspects to master if the learners wanted to master speaking skills. Also, the research of (Balcı & Çakır, 2012) confirms that vocabulary mastery is a necessity across all levels of language mastery. This statement has strengthened the previous statement that a learner cannot properly communicate with others if the vocabulary mastery is below average. Several language scientists (Folse & Briggs, 2007; Grove & Lewis, 1994) also state that communication can still happen even when syntax and grammar are excluded, meanwhile vocabulary cannot exist without it. Based on the statements above, it's undeniably true that the learners will have a hard time to properly said their ideas, thought, or feelings nor are capable to understand a written text and uttered words if they have little to no vocabulary mastery. Thus, making vocabulary mastery a necessary thing for achieving the desired language proficiency (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). Furthermore, (Huckin & Coady, 1999) emphasize that the value of expanding one's vocabulary is crucial for each language learner since vocabulary is where the language begins and continues to develop. Grammar learning has been well-known for the longest time as the most antagonizing school subject for those seeking further mastery in English (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011). On the other hand, there are strong beliefs among grammar learners that grammar is crucial to study if they want to increase English mastery (Widodo, 2006). Thus, making the students have a hard time learning and understanding what the teachers have taught them.

Speaking Anxiety

So far, there are three parts of anxiety that have been known from a psychological point of view which include trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situational anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner,

1991; Teimouri et al., 2019). Additionally, there is also a sub-category of a situational anxiety, in which can be called as “situation-specific anxiety” which talks about a person’s fear or nervousness about a certain event in the future, either it’s a test announcement, public speech, or classroom discussion. In speaking context, speaking anxiety is one of the many examples of how situational anxiety can only be connected to foreign language learning instead of the other anxiety forms (Horwitz, 2017; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Woodrow, 2006). Because foreign language learning is a learning process that also includes psychological factors, anxiety can be present in language learning, thus, foreign language anxiety originates from. Moreover, (Horwitz et al., 1986) categorized language learning anxiety into three different categories, which consisting of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Specifically, (Horwitz et al., 1986) stated that communication apprehension is a type of communication limitation that comes from fear of communicating to people.

To overcome anxiety, the researcher has discovered the strategies created by (Mahmud & Suryana, 2015) and simplified them into two parts, that is positive thinking which requires the students to focus on encouraging and pleasant cues instead of stressful events, and peer-seeking which requires the learner to find another students who appear to be struggling with anxiety management or the comprehension of the material.

METHOD

For this kind of research title, qualitative research suits the best. J. W Cresswell and J. D Cresswell state that qualitative research is a research technique that generates qualitative data in the form of verbatim, written statements, or recorded actions from the research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As a result, this research will only emphasize the meaning of the interview the researcher will transcribe.

Methodological Positioning

The research is framed within the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2014), which indicates that knowledge is actively constructed through social interactions among learners, educators, and the use of digital tools for this approach promotes understanding about the journey of a language learner to master speaking confidence. To ensure objectivity and credibility, reflexive methods will be present in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method of approach allows the researcher to reflect thoroughly on how their background and assumptions may affect the data results.

Research Design

This study involves phenomenological research design which is the researchers’ preferred method for this research topic, because this research will dive into exploration of the personal stories and experiences of the non-native English speaker as they are transforming from silence to confidence in their speaking abilities (Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019; Wei, 2021). This approach enables the researcher to discover the journey of the language mastery from the participants. This research design is also put all the focus at the perspectives of the participants, providing a diverse and in-depth view into their journey of speaking mastery as the result (Dincer, 2017).

Instruments

The research instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview, designed to explore participants' experiences in depth while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions. The interview guide has undergone content validation by experts to ensure that the questions are clear, relevant, and effectively produce meaningful responses. This validation process helps maintain the reliability and credibility of the collected data, ensuring that participants fully understand the questions and can express their thoughts accurately. The study maintains a

balance between consistent questioning and flexibility to encompass participants' diverse viewpoints and experiences by using a semi-structured format.

Research Participants

The researcher recruited participants who met four specific criteria. First, they are currently struggling with English. Second, they have demonstrated progressive academic improvement, starting from lower grades and gradually achieving higher ones. Third, they have never traveled or lived overseas, ensuring that their English learning experience is primarily within their local environment. Lastly, they must have had some experience in speaking English in any form. These criteria were established to ensure that the selected participants align with the study's objectives.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher approached them by making them a consent letter consisting of the purpose of the research, risks, and benefits, confidential guarantee, voluntary participation, and agreement to participate in the research.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed thematic analysis with the goal of discovering and developing new themes using appropriate coding techniques (Creswell, 2007). For this study, an inductive coding approach was employed, following a bottom-up process in which the researcher begins without predefined codes and instead develops them organically through data analysis. The codes are generated directly from the transcription of interview recordings, which the researchers systematically organize. This approach allows patterns and themes to emerge naturally from the data, ensuring a more grounded and context-specific analysis.

Thematic analysis in this study followed three main stages: familiarization, categorization, and classification. First, during the familiarization phase, the researchers thoroughly reviewed the transcribed material, carefully reading and re-reading the data while making initial notes on recurring concepts and patterns. This step ensured a deep understanding of the content before further analysis. Next, the researchers applied and reassessed codes, segmenting the data into meaningful units. Each identified code was grouped under broader categories, with subcategories emerging as the analysis progressed. This iterative process involved continuous refinement, allowing for adjustments in coding structures to better capture the nuances of the data.

Finally, during the classification phase, the researchers systematically examined the coded data, identifying relationships among categories and synthesizing them into overarching themes. To enhance reliability and consistency, they engaged in re-coding and reclassifying responses as necessary, ensuring that the final themes accurately represented the participants' perspectives. Through this rigorous approach, the study was able to uncover deep insights into the research topic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the research, which meant to explore how participants improved their English-speaking confidence. The data was gathered through interview questions posed to students from public and private universities who have successfully enhanced their speaking confidence and fluency. The interviews were conducted using a validated semi-structured interview guide. As for the participants, the researcher has managed to gather a total of 10 participants to be interviewed. After collecting the responses, the researcher analyzed the data to identify the emerging themes of the journey to English-speaking mastery. The findings are organized by three research questions and followed by an in-depth discussion

of said emerging themes. Relevant excerpts from participant responses are included to support the analysis.

Participant Demographics

The participants comprised 10 university students, aged between 18 and 20, who were identified as having successfully enhanced their speaking confidence. Table 1. provides a summary of the participant demographics.

Participant	Institution Type	Gender	Major	Background setting
P1	Private	Male	Accounting	Bekasi
P2	Private	Male	Information System	Southern Jakarta
P3	Private	Female	French Literature	Makassar
P4	Private	Female	Nursing	Lampung
P5	Private	Female	Nursing	Lampung
P6	Public	Female	Civil Engineering	Southern Tangerang
P7	Public	Female	History	Palembang
P8	Public	Female	Medical	Palembang
P9	Public	Female	Civil Engineering	Jakarta
P10	Public	Female	Medical	North Toraja

Research Question 1 - Oral Communication Challenges Non-Native English-Speaking Students Face in University.

The research question of this topic is to discover challenges of participants in improving their self-esteem to be able to speak English. Based on the data gained from the interview, there are three emerging themes that were composed of participants' actual experience.

Linguistic and Expression Challenges

Most of the participants (n=10) asserted that they face certain challenges in improving their communication in English. They stated that oral communication in English remains an uphill battle, especially for non-English speaking learners, because they are short of language and expression practices. Participants still reported problems related to the range of vocabulary while attempting to sustain fluency in ideas and thought in English. Such challenges often prevented some from participating fully in class discussions or feeling comfortable enough to speak in a professional context.

"My biggest challenge in English-speaking is that I don't know much vocabulary and I tend to get nervous when I speak in English." (Interviewee 3)

In addition, using only simple structures made them feel incompetent (Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019), which in turn positively discouraged their active contribution to the language in use.

"My grammar is not too good when I communicate to people. I also tend to be afraid when I talk to people because I'm afraid that the people are not really understand about what I say." (Interviewee 4)

The language barriers hampered the ability to convey the intended meaning and contributed to the sense of inferiority in the interaction with other students and with the teachers. (Steffani, 2007).

Fear-based communication challenges

Ineffective communication in oral form was, however, impeded by fear and anxiety. Several participants recollected the times when they were anxious while speaking in public or on formal occasions like presentations or when addressing large audiences. Such anxiety arose from several reasons, including fear of errors, being evaluated by others, or fear of criticism.

"The biggest struggle for me is, I tend to think too much in my head when I try to speak English with people, worrying about vocabulary and grammar structure and also fear of making mistakes." (Interviewee 4)

This apprehension frequently manifested as avoidance behaviors, with students opting for silence to mitigate the risk of embarrassment. Intriguingly, several participants observed that smaller, more informal group settings alleviated their anxiety, enabling greater verbal engagement – underscoring the pivotal role of social context in cultivating speaking proficiency.

"I feel nervous when I talk to audience, but I felt a little bit confident when I speak to a smaller audience." (Interviewee 5)

It is interesting that some of the participants noted that their anxiety was lessened in smaller and informal groups, which allowed them to be more verbal. Under such environments, the student was less self-conscious and more linguistically adventurous, due to the decreased size of the audience and a feeling of comfort.

This finding highlights the necessity of social environment in teaching speaking skills. The contrast between formal and informal settings raises how specific communication environments may affect the students' level of confidence and participation (Subekti, 2018). Therefore, these casual interactions were often role-playing where students could develop the language and interpersonal skills needed in more challenging speaking contexts in the future.

External Feedback and Motivation

External feedback, both the positive and the negative, helped to shape how the students experienced oral communication (Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019). Particularly compliments by instructors were emphasized as critical sources of positive reinforcement that contributed to the development of confidence and speaking skills.

"It's like nothing special to them, because to them it's more like I try to express myself when I use English with them" (Interviewee 1).

On the contrary, even complaints from critics involving some constructive criticism on issues like pronunciation and intonation assisted in the quest for self-improvement. However,

respondents did indicate at times being apprehensive about the reactions of their peers which sometimes made them hesitant to speak.

“Sometimes, my friends are also confused when I talk in English because of my mispronunciation.” (Interviewee 4).

Despite those concerns, students who received constructive remarks expressed more readiness to work harder and a greater willingness to overcome the challenges faced in communication. Participants were aware of their challenges in speaking English. The following is the data interpretation to identify patterns, themes and insights:

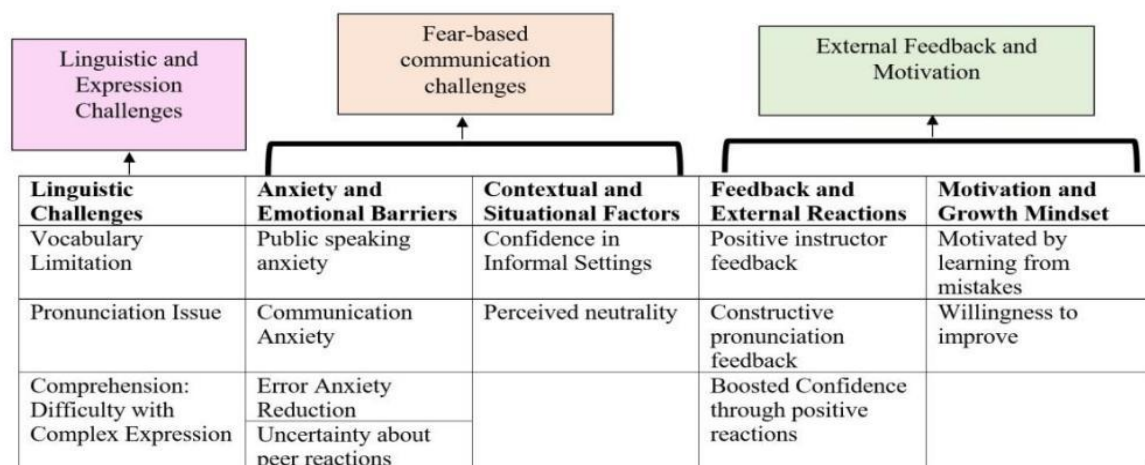


Figure 1. Emerging Themes of Research Question #1

These findings illustrate the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by non-native English-speaking students, emphasizing the interplay between linguistic proficiency, emotional resilience, and external support in fostering effective oral communication.

Research Question 2 - Balancing Native Language Identity and English Proficiency: How Non-Native Speakers Adapt

The key participants of this study navigate the balance between maintaining their native language identity and developing English-speaking proficiency through a combination of personal beliefs, cultural awareness, and strategic language use. The exploration of how non-native English-speaking students navigate the interplay between their native language identity and English-speaking proficiency revealed three significant themes: Maintaining Language Identity and Cultural Heritage, Strategic Use of Language for Effective Communication, and Balancing and Adapting to Linguistic Demands:

Maintaining Language Identity and Cultural Heritage

Participants consistently expressed the importance of preserving their native language and cultural identity as an integral part of who they are. Many emphasized that their native language represents their roots, upbringing, and personal identity. They viewed maintaining their native language to stay connected to their cultural heritage and familial traditions, even while learning English.

“It is important for me to maintain my native language while learning English, because it is my identity after all.” (Interviewee 5)

As seen from the excerpt, one participant highlighted the symbolic value of their native language as a reminder of "where they come from" and how it forms a part of their self-concept. This sense of cultural pride often motivated students to find a balance rather than allow one language to overshadow the other. The preservation of their native language served not only as a source of personal authenticity but also as a foundation for navigating their bilingual identities (Furotun et al., 2023).

“I think it can help either hinder my progress of English language learning, because sometimes there are English words that are quite similar or different from Indonesian words.” (Interviewee 6)

Not only did the maintenance of their native language provide a sense of self, but it also helped them to negotiate their biculturalism.

“I think that using native language is helps me in my English learning.” (Interviewee 4)

For the key participants, the native language helped in shaping their culture by helping them in forming and practicing their cherished tradition (Sukanto et al., 2021). This attachment offered emotional relief and the sense of belonging which was very important in areas where English was the mode of communication.

Strategic Use of Language for Effective Communication

Another key finding was the deliberate and context-dependent use of both native and English languages to achieve effective communication. Participants described using their native language as a supportive tool in their English learning journey. For example, they noted that similarities between their native language and English helped them understand complex linguistic concepts and facilitated smoother transitions between languages.

“It’s very important to maintain my language, because my native language is the language that we are born with. That is why in my opinion I should balance myself when learning the two languages.” (Interviewee 6)

Additionally, code-switching emerged as a common strategy, enabling students to navigate social and academic settings effectively (Shafi, 2020). Participants expressed comfort in switching between languages, often choosing the language that best conveyed their intended meaning or was more contextually appropriate.

“It helps a lot. When I try to express things in English but if I forget the words in English, that’s where my native language helps. It’s to remind me what’s the meaning of the word in my native language before I translate it to English” (Interviewee 10)

This ability to strategically use both languages reflected their growing linguistic agility and adaptability. Additionally, the use of native language was often described as a cognitive anchor, helping students clarify complex ideas before expressing them in English (Biró & Kató,

2024). Rather than hindering their English development, this strategic reliance on their native language facilitated deeper understanding and better articulation of their thoughts. By leveraging their bilingualism, they turned potential linguistic limitations into assets, effectively negotiating meaning across languages and cultures.

“Speaking English has greatly affected me because I have a significant improvement in my academic performances. It improves my participation. My friends will trust me to do the presentation if our group will present about something.” (Interviewee 8)

This strategic approach underscored the participants’ resilience and creativity in overcoming communication challenges. It demonstrated their ability to integrate their native language and English in ways that enhanced their academic participation, built stronger interpersonal connections, and preserved their sense of linguistic and cultural identity. Ultimately, this adaptability contributed significantly to their growth as confident and effective communicators in a multilingual environment.

Balancing and Adapting to Linguistic Demands

The findings also highlighted the dynamic process of balancing the demands of native language preservation with the need to develop English-speaking proficiency.

“When the people from GC come to Indonesia and they wanted to buy something, I am struggled in speaking with them who can speak very well. They wanted me to lead them to buy some stuff, and I must speak fluently.” (Interviewee 7)

While some participants experienced moments of cultural dissonance, such as navigating differences in honorifics or communication styles, these experiences were typically framed as "culture shock" rather than conflict.

“In my opinion, it’s more like a culture shock rather than a conflict. Indonesian people used to call other people with honorifics, while the westerners in my environment does not use honorifics to call their friends. Apparently, westerners only used honorifics when they tried to communicate with their lecturers.” (Interviewee 4)

The key participants demonstrated adaptability by acknowledging and preparing for potential challenges, even if they had not yet encountered them. For example, one participant emphasized the importance of learning "when to speak fully in English" versus mixing languages, suggesting a conscious effort to adapt to varying linguistic demands.

“I feel like this one is good thing in my opinion, so we can learn when to speak fully on English, and when to speak half English and half Indonesian.” (Interviewee 8)

This adaptability reflected their ability to integrate both linguistic identities in ways that complemented their goals, whether academic, social, or cultural (Husna & Nasrullah, 2023). The following is the data interpretation to identify patterns, themes and insights:

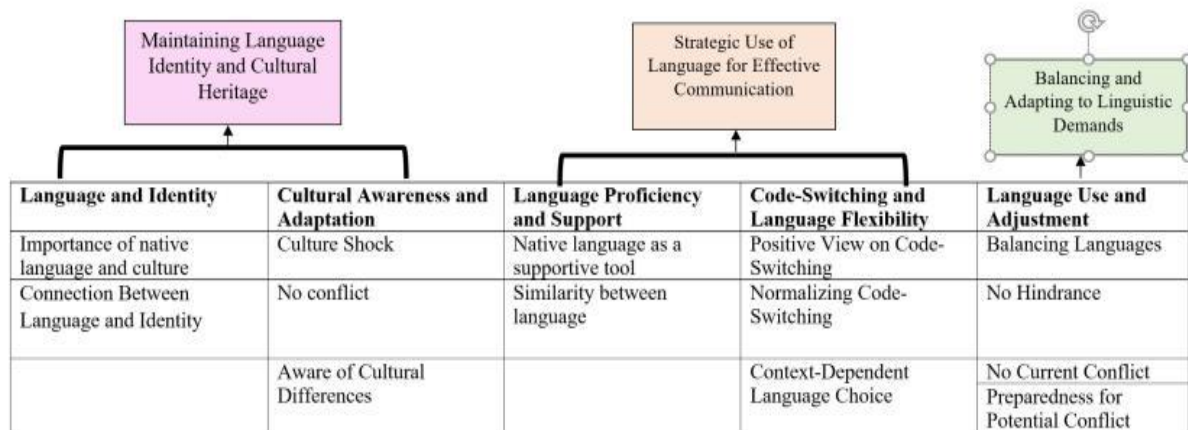


Figure 2. Emerging Themes of Research Question #2

The findings illustrate that non-native English-speaking students navigate the balance between native language identity and English proficiency through an intricate interplay of preservation, strategic communication, and adaptability. Their experiences underscore the significance of cultural grounding and linguistic flexibility in fostering both personal identity and effective communication. These insights reveal the nuanced ways students manage the coexistence of their linguistic worlds, offering valuable implications for educational practices that aim to support bilingual learners in higher education settings (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2022).

Research Question 3 - Impact of Gaining Confidence on Academic Performance and Social Integration of Non-Native English Speakers

The findings for this research question underscore the transformative effect of confidence on both academic performance and social integration among non-native English-speaking students. Three key themes emerged:

Confidence Boosting Academic and Social Engagement

Participants highlighted the significant role confidence played in fostering their academic engagement and social interactions.

"The moment when I feel that my English is improving is when I speak to people and somewhat the fear of speaking within me gone out of the window." (Interviewee 6)

While not all students observed a direct improvement in grades, many noted that their confidence allowed them to participate more actively in academic tasks such as discussions, presentations, and group projects.

"My speaking ability comes to effect when I had an Olympiad competition that indirectly influenced me to improve my speaking skills." (Interviewee 5)

This increased participation often translated into a greater understanding of academic content, even if it did not always reflect directly on their grades. Socially, confidence encouraged students to take initiative in interactions with both peers and faculty, breaking the barrier of silence and enabling meaningful exchanges.

"I could feel my improvement of my English-speaking confidence when my lecturer compliments me in my speaking capability. I realized that my English-speaking capability

is not that bad because of it, and through it, I could improve my speaking capability even more.” (interviewee 4).

This shift from silence to active engagement marked a critical step in their journey toward integrating into university life. Initially hesitant to contribute in academic or social settings due to fear of making mistakes or feeling inadequately prepared, these students began to overcome their apprehensions as their confidence grew (Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019). This transformation allowed them to move from being passive observers to active participants in discussions, group projects, and social interactions.

“I noticed positive changes when I can make people understand my presentation and the class materials brought by the lecturer in the classroom. Sometimes, the lecturer brought the material in English, and my classmates didn’t understand it very well. So, I helped them, and it strengthen my relationship with my peers.” (Interviewee 1).

This progression from silence to confidence also signified their growing ability to adapt to a linguistically and culturally diverse environment, an essential skill for success in a globalized academic setting. It underscored their resilience in overcoming the challenges of linguistic limitations and fear-based barriers, transforming these obstacles into opportunities for personal growth and integration (Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019). This transformation was not only about language mastery but also about their evolving identities (Q. Guo et al., 2021) as active members of their academic and social communities.

Confidence and Peer relationships

Speaking English with confidence altered the impact English had on students’ relationships with their colleagues. Many participants expressed how their enhanced communication skills enabled them to connect with others in a better way. Confident students enjoyed starting conversations and participating in groups, which resulted in increased integration with other peers.

“I often ask my friends about words that I forget and do not know what the meaning about the word is. It helps me a lot.” (Interviewee 9)

However, some participants pointed out that while confidence was helpful, the degree of friendships among the peers was quite often more dependent on commonalities and understanding each other rather than language skills.

“Being confident in English influenced my interactions with my friends greatly.” (Interviewee 2)

For those who did build closer relationships, confidence in English was beneficial making them more collaborative and friendly. That self-confidence, which was newly acquired, enabled them to communicate with other members of the group more freely, participating in academic works and social events, regardless of the worry whether they would make mistakes or be misinterpreted.

Continuous Learning as a key to confidence growth

A recurring theme in participants’ responses was the recognition of continuous learning as integral to building and maintaining confidence. Most key participants attributed their growth to consistent practice, exposure to English in diverse contexts, and the willingness to embrace mistakes as learning opportunities.

"I can feel my English-speaking skills improved when I am speaking with the people who can speak English very well." (Interviewee 7)

"The solution is to use code-switching to ease up the communication process when I am trying to talk or practice speaking in English." (Interviewee 10)

"I think for me the best one is speaking English everywhere. It helps me to get my confidence and to improve my speaking." (Interviewee 2)

"I always watch English Movie with English subtitle or without subtitle. I can also learn by playing some games to understand English better." (Interviewee 6)

Unforgettable experiences, such as participating in English-speaking activities or receiving positive feedback from peers and instructors, served as milestones that strengthen their confidence in their capabilities (Barney & Maughan, 2015). The mindset of a lifetime learner does not only enhance their speaking proficiency but also initiates resilience and adaptability within their minds, the key traits to achieve academic success and social integration (Barnes & Tour, 2023; Macaro, 2020).

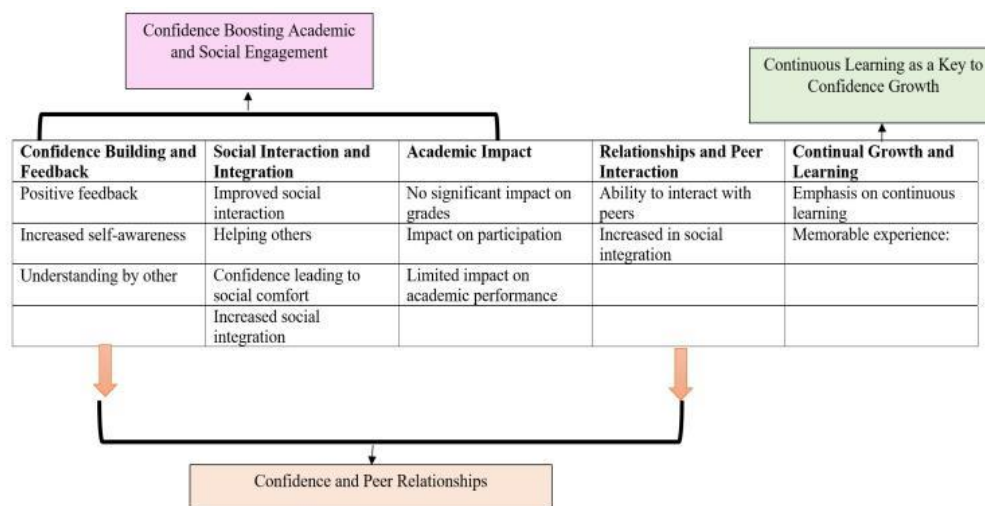


Figure 3. Emerging Themes of Research Question #3

Transitioning from silence to confidence leaves a significant impact on the participants' academic and social lives. Self-confidence results in broader participation in academic settings, allowing the students to accomplish tasks that focus heavily on verbal communication (Mcbain, 2018). In terms of social aspects, it can also improve relationships for the better and strengthen the sense of belonging within peers. Undergo this transformation shows dedication to lifelong learning, encouraging the students to enhance their linguistic capabilities and self-assurance. These findings highlight the relation in between confidence, academic involvement, and social integration, showcasing the necessity of shaping supportive environments to aid non-native English-speaking students in their development.

Discussions

The findings of this study give a new insight on the complex and varied challenges faced by non-native English-speaking students in their university communication experiences. Linguistically, participants struggle with vocabulary limitations, insufficient amounts of language practice, and the repetitive usage of basic structures. The absence of language mastery preventing their ability to fluently express their ideas, which leads to feelings of incompetence

and decreasing the will to participate in both academic and professional settings. The anxiety of communicating in English was worsen by fear of making mistakes, being corrected, or being misunderstood, which led to avoidance tendencies and a confidence deficit. However, the study also spotted the crucial role of the social context in these struggles. Participants have figured out that their anxiety could be reduced when they are in smaller, more informal settings where they felt more comfortable and less self-conscious, underlining the importance of forming supportive environments to build speaking proficiency.

Despite their basic proficiency in English, participants often faced challenges in expressing themselves fluently. This highlights a gap between basic language acquisition and effective communication, emphasizing the need for focused support in language practice and vocabulary development to help bridge the gap between passive knowledge and active usage. Furthermore, the study revealed that the fear of making mistakes and being judged contributed significantly to students' speaking anxiety. This finding defies the common assumption that language anxiety primarily stems from the lack of language knowledge. Instead, it suggests that the psychological and emotional factors associated with fear of failure and evaluation play a pivotal role in impeding language use.

Related to the case, external feedback and positive criticism is a crucial factor for improving students' confidence and language mastery. Positive encouragement, particularly from instructors, assisting the students to build self-esteem and encouraging them to overcome their fears. On the other hand, constructive criticism, such as feedback on pronunciation or grammar, can also be deemed as a necessary tool for self-improvement, although it caused dread at the start. These findings discovers that non-native English-speaking students are favoring feedback that is both supportive and corrective, as it motivates them to continue developing their speaking abilities.

The study also explored the variative ways of the students to balance their language origin identity with their desire to improve English fluency. There are a lot of participants who have a high need to maintain their native language as an inseparable part of their cultural identity and habits. Their connection to their native language giving them a sense of emotional relief and belonging, which was a crucial thing in academic settings where English was the primary way to communicate. Students are also involved in strategic language use, making use of their native language as a reference to aid them understand complex English words, as well as using code-switching to smoothen the communication process in both social and academic environment. This adaptability allowed students to utilize their bilingualism to navigate between languages and cultures effectively, which as a result, will enhance their academic performance and social integration.

As these students become more confident in their English-speaking skills, they reported an increased improvement in their academic involvement and social interactions. The feeling of self-assurance gained from speaking English with greater fluency allowed participants to engage more actively in class discussions, group projects, and presentations. Although not all participants experienced a slight impact on their grades, their increased participation led to a deeper understanding of the study material and strengthened relationships with both peers and instructors. Confidence also served as a important role in enhancing social integration, as students became more willing to socialize with others, ask questions, and offer assistance, which fostered a stronger sense of belonging within their academic communities.

Continuous learning was the main topic in the participants' responses, with many emphasizing the importance of consistent practice and exposure to English in diverse contexts. This mindset of ongoing learning not only contributed to their linguistic development but also strengthened their belief in their abilities. Students who embraced mistakes as opportunities to

grow further were able to overcome their fears and increase their confidence in their speaking skills. The findings show that confidence is not only important for effective communication but also for social integration and academic success. As students become more comfortable with their language skills, they are more likely to participate actively, build relationships, and navigate the challenges of university life, illustrating the interconnection of language proficiency, confidence, and personal growth in higher education settings.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study underscores how language proficiency, emotional resilience, and external support collectively shape the development of effective verbal communication among non-native English-speaking university students. Beyond merely overcoming linguistic barriers, the students in this study demonstrated a significant transformation—from hesitant, self-conscious speakers to confident communicators capable of navigating academic and social contexts. This transformation was marked by their ability to persist through the fear of speaking, maintain pride in their native language identity, and gradually build confidence through consistent practice and reflective learning. The findings emphasize the pivotal role of supportive environments, constructive feedback, and ample speaking opportunities in fostering this personal and linguistic growth. These insights contribute meaningfully to understanding how non-native students evolve not only in language competence but also in self-perception and social participation, offering valuable implications for educators and policymakers aiming to design inclusive and empowering language education programs in higher education.

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