

Challenges faced by Vietnamese university English majors in speaking English and their motivation for improving speaking skills

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ABSTRACT

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In today's interconnected world, English proficiency is no longer a choice but a necessity for progress. This study investigates the challenges faced by final-year English-major students in Vietnamese public universities and their motivation for improving their speaking skills. Through questionnaires, 91 students revealed moderate difficulties in speaking skills stemming from psychological and linguistic factors. Also, students generally display a moderate level of motivation to improve their speaking skills, indicating varied sources of motivation. Significantly, a noteworthy correlation is observed between difficulties in speaking skills and speaking achievement, underscoring the interlinked nature of these variables. However, motivation did not correlate with either speaking difficulties or achievement. This study emphasizes the intricacies of language learning, advocating for educators to employ comprehensive approaches that address the diverse challenges and motivations influencing students' proficiency in speaking skills. These insights can contribute to shaping educational policies, designing curricula, and teaching strategies to enhance the English learning experience for students at public universities in Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, the importance of English proficiency cannot be overstated. It serves as the lingua franca of international communication, enabling individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds to connect and collaborate effectively (Masuram & Sripada, 2020). In other words, spoken English proficiency is not merely a desirable skill but a necessity in various spheres of life, including education, business, diplomacy, and culture. Despite its undeniable importance, challenges persist in attaining and maintaining proficiency in English. Megawati and Mandarani (2016) highlight several issues that learners commonly encounter, such as deficits in vocabulary and grammar. These challenges can hinder comprehension and expression, making it difficult for individuals to engage in meaningful communication fully.

Moreover, anxiety often plays a significant role in impeding language acquisition and fluency (Megawati & Mandarani, 2016). Souisa and Gaité (2020) emphasize the psychological factors that can affect speaking ability, including fear of making mistakes, self-consciousness, and pressure to perform. Furthermore, motivation emerges as an indispensable factor in learning,

especially when acquiring foreign languages (Kumar, 2021). According to Menggo (2018), high motivation enables learners to navigate learning situations effectively and seek opportunities to develop language skills. When motivated, learners demonstrate autonomy and adaptability, which are crucial for success in language acquisition. Thus, motivation significantly influences learners' challenges in acquiring speaking skills in a foreign language.

Recent research in Vietnam underscores students' struggles with English speaking, revealing various hindrances to their skill development (Doan, 2011; Huynh, 2020; Mai, 2022). Mai (2022) investigated factors affecting speaking difficulties among English majors, involving 30 participants studying English as a foreign language at a Vietnamese university. Findings highlighted challenges such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation deficits alongside psychological, linguistic, and environmental influences. Similarly, Huynh (2020) studied 65 Vietnamese university English majors, revealing pervasive challenges encompassing language-related (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) and non-linguistic issues (e.g., psychological, social, and teaching method-related problems).

Although several studies have delved into difficulties in learning English speaking skills among Vietnamese university students, limited studies (e.g., Tran & Dang, 2019; Trinh & Pham, 2021; Vo et al., 2018) have been conducted on Vietnamese university English majors at public institutions regarding the challenges they face in learning the English speaking skill and their motivation to enhance this skill. Hence, this research aims to investigate the general difficulties in speaking skills that English majors at Vietnamese public universities experience and their motivation level to enhance their speaking skills. Also, the study seeks to examine the relationship between motivation and speaking achievement. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of speaking difficulty perceived by final-year English majors?
2. What is the motivation level to improve the speaking skills of final-year English majors?
3. Is there a relationship between difficulty in speaking skills, motivation, and the speaking achievement of final-year English majors?

2. Literature review

2.1. Studies on English speaking difficulties among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners

Speaking is a fundamental and essential skill, enabling individuals to communicate and convey their thoughts effectively. It is a productive skill in second or foreign language acquisition, facilitating direct communication with others (Purnawati, 2021). According to Kürüm (2016), speaking skills encompass three knowledge aspects: pragmatics, cultural and social conventions, and norms (such as turn-taking and the rate of speech), mechanics (including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary), and functions (transaction and interaction). Speaking difficulties encompass various challenges hindering effective communication in English (Jannah & Fitriati, 2016), stemming from factors like intonation, punctuation, and body language (Yusa, 2021). These difficulties can be categorised into psychological and linguistic characteristics.

Numerous studies have highlighted students' speaking difficulties, attributing them to linguistic and psychological factors (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Mai, 2022; Purnawati, 2021). Amoah and Yeboah (2021) identify vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation as linguistic factors affecting speaking proficiency. Deghani et al. (2016) emphasize the challenges in mastering

grammar, which is crucial for understanding English. Vocabulary difficulty, encompassing pronunciation, writing, and selecting appropriate meanings, further complicates language learning (Rohmatillah, 2014). Pronunciation mastery is essential for understanding connected speech (Lasabuda, 2017). Additionally, the influence of the mother tongue adds challenges, particularly in structural differences between Vietnamese and English (Cao et al., 2021).

Besides linguistic factors, psychological factors significantly affect students' difficulties in learning English speaking skills. Fitriati (2016) defines psychological factors as the study of individuals' interactions with their surroundings and their thoughts and behaviors. Arifin (2017) characterizes psychological issues as those affecting mental or physical health. In speaking classrooms, common psychological issues like shyness, lack of confidence, and fear contribute to students' nervousness when speaking English (Haidara, 2016). These psychological barriers significantly impede students' speaking abilities.

Empirical studies highlight common challenges faced by EFL students worldwide in learning English speaking skills. Wulandari et al. (2022) surveyed tenth-grade students in Indonesia, revealing issues such as grammar deficiencies, incorrect pronunciation, worry, lack of confidence, and insufficient practice. Similarly, Tokoz-Goktepe (2014) observed vocabulary limitations, grammar issues, and a lack of exposure to the language outside the classroom among Turkistan university students. Normawati et al. (2023) found pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar to be primary challenges among Indonesian students at Universitas Tidar, with grammar being the most prominent. Additionally, Gan (2013) identified language insufficiency, conversational skills, and affective influence as challenges among Chinese university students. These findings underscore the importance of tailored instructional strategies to enhance English as a Second Language (ESL) or EFL speaking abilities.

Numerous studies on EFL and ESL learners emphasize the significance of psychological factors, particularly anxiety, alongside linguistic challenges. Tok (2009) identified anxiety and unwillingness to communicate as major obstacles among Turkish college students, stemming from shyness and fear of negative evaluations. Similarly, Sadighi and Dastpak (2017) found fear of making mistakes and lack of vocabulary knowledge to be primary sources of anxiety among Iranian students. Rafada and Madini (2017) attributed speaking anxiety among Saudi EFL learners to inadequate vocabulary, deficiencies in the educational system, and test-related anxiety. Additionally, Bhattachaiyakorn and Phettakua (2023) highlighted language learning beliefs, test anxiety, grammar, vocabulary, and English speaking level as key factors influencing speaking anxiety among Thai students majoring in English and Communication. These studies stress the importance of addressing psychological factors in language education to facilitate effective language learning and communication.

2.2. Studies on English speaking difficulties among Vietnamese students

Do (2021) identified elements affecting Vietnamese university students' English-speaking ability, revealing that higher levels of worry, lower English language proficiency, reduced motivation, and lack of confidence led to significant speaking challenges. Similarly, Trinh and Pham (2021) studied speaking classes for Vietnamese university non-English majors. Their research involving 57 students found linguistic challenges to be predominant, with psychological issues including performance pressure, feeling overwhelmed by proficient classmates, fear of making mistakes, and apprehension about negative feedback. Linguistic challenges encompassed vocabulary limitations, illogical concept arrangement, poor sentence construction, and improper vocabulary usage.

Additionally, Vo et al. (2018) surveyed 131 first-year English majors at a public university, revealing both internal and external obstacles, with English-speaking environments and extracurricular activities posing significant challenges. Similarly, Pham et al. (2020) investigated factors influencing speaking skills among 280 eleventh-grade students at Tay Nguyen High School. They found difficulties related to correctness, fluency, and appropriateness in language use, alongside non-linguistic issues like mother tongue use, inhibition, and passive involvement.

Moreover, Tran and Dang (2019) conducted a quantitative study on 150 English majors to examine affective, social, instructional, and linguistic speaking difficulties. Their findings indicated that speaking challenges, particularly emotional issues, significantly affected students' speaking abilities, with instructional issues posing the least difficulty. The study also highlighted the influence of language study duration on speaking proficiency among English majors, offering suggestions for improvement. Similarly, Mai (2022) investigated factors affecting English major students' speaking difficulties, emphasizing linguistic factors such as vocabulary and subject knowledge, alongside psychological factors like lack of confidence. These findings resonate with previous research, indicating persistent challenges in speaking abilities among students majoring in English despite years of English study.

2.3. Motivation for learning English speaking skills among EFL learners

Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018) emphasize the pivotal role of motivation in second language proficiency, especially in acquiring speaking skills. Motivation generates interest and enthusiasm, shaping learners' perceptions of the importance of oral skills and fostering a willingness to learn and improve. It directly impacts communication fluency and the learner's eagerness to acquire knowledge, aligning with their aspirations and future goals. Ultimately, learners' proficiency levels are influenced by the effort they invest, which is often contingent on their motivation- a dynamic aspect influenced by various factors. Integrative motivation, as described by Troike (2006), stems from a desire to connect with the second language (L2) community, driven by emotional and affective factors, while instrumental motivation focuses on practical benefits like professional advancement or academic requirements. Both orientations are considered essential for achieving proficiency in the L2.

Previous studies on EFL learners indicate the influence of both integrative and instrumental motivation. Ulla (2020) found a high level of motivation among 137 Thai English learners at a public university, particularly in learning speaking skills. Similarly, Menggo (2018) observed intrinsic and extrinsic motivations contributing to English-speaking motivation among 48 students in a senior high school science program. Nguyen and Van (2018) highlighted the influence of instrumental and integrative motivations on speaking skills among 145 first-year Vietnamese university students. Al-Qahtani (2013) discovered motivation driven by both factors among 120 first-year Saudi Arabian female students. Alotumi (2021) identified various self-regulated motivational techniques employed by 300 Yemeni university English majors. Additionally, Skripsi (2019) revealed intrinsic and extrinsic motivations among four Indonesian students from an English Education course offered at a private Muslim university.

Various studies suggest that the levels of integrative and instrumental motivation can differ among different groups of Asian learners. For example, Amoah and Yeboah (2021) explored speaking difficulties among 75 Chinese university students, reporting a balanced level of motivation, slightly favoring integrative over instrumental motivation. Similarly, Dincer and

Yesilyurt (2017) found that intrinsic motivation tends to be higher, indicating that internal factors such as a desire for fulfillment and pleasure drive students' motivation to participate in English-speaking classes. Rianita (2023) investigated the motivations of 87 first-semester Management Studies Program students in Indonesia, finding high intrinsic motivation driven by enjoyment of the classroom and perceived future career benefits. However, Radfar and Lengkanawati (2020) found high motivation levels among 50 Indonesian English majors, with instrumental motivation prevailing over integrative motivation.

Research suggests a positive correlation between motivation and language achievement. For example, Fatimah and Sale (2019) investigated Indonesian students' motivation and speaking achievement, finding a moderate level of motivation and achievement with a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between the two. Similarly, Curle et al. (2024) examined the impact of gender, English proficiency, and motivation on academic achievement in English Medium Instruction in Turkey. Their study of 143 second-year Business Administration students revealed English proficiency as the strongest predictor, with motivation also playing a significant role, while gender showed no significant predictive power.

Hu and McGeown (2020) examined foreign language (FL) motivation in 631 Chinese primary school students aged 9 to 12, investigating its relationship with FL achievement. They found higher value motivation, especially among girls, with a decline noted with age. Regression analyses revealed both expectancy and value significantly predicted FL achievement, with expectancy being the stronger predictor. Similarly, Yuntao (2019) surveyed 624 non-English speaking majors at a Chinese public university, discovering positive correlations between Motivation, Grit, and English language performance. Additionally, Ahmetovic et al. (2020) explored foreign language classroom anxiety and motivation among 160 English-speaking middle and high school students, finding that intrinsic motivation positively predicted EFL achievement, while communication apprehension had a negative impact.

2.4. Relationship between difficulties in learning English speaking skills and speaking achievement

Speaking skills have become increasingly crucial for English learners, with language proficiency often assessed through production skills, mainly speaking. According to Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021), evaluating speaking skills necessitates considering achievement as a crucial factor. Several research papers explore the interplay between psychological factors and speaking achievement among English learners.

Al-Khotaba et al. (2020) investigated the impact of foreign language speaking anxiety on the speaking achievement of Saudi EFL learners, revealing a negative correlation between speaking achievement and speaking anxiety among 100 foundation-year Saudi Arabian university students. Interestingly, this negative correlation implied that students with lower speaking anxiety tended to achieve higher proficiency in speaking skills and vice versa. In contrast, Tridinanti (2018) found no association between speaking anxiety and speaking performance among undergraduate EFL students in Indonesia. However, students with higher confidence levels demonstrated greater achievements in speaking skills.

Zainurrahman and Sangaji (2019) conducted a study with 14 undergraduate Indonesian students from the English Department, revealing that psychological factors such as reluctance, low self-esteem, and the need for vocabulary mastery impact students' speaking performance.

Similarly, Jaya et al. (2022) surveyed 67 fifth-semester English education students, with 42% performing well in speaking tests. The study categorized speaking issues into linguistic, social, and affected issues, citing factors such as lack of knowledge, fear of mistakes, and low motivation contributing to speaking difficulties.

Likewise, Fitriani and Apriliaswati (2015) focused on third-semester Indonesian university students, highlighting psychological issues, anxiety, and lack of confidence as predominant problems affecting speaking achievement, alongside linguistic issues such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. In line with these findings, Diaab (2016) investigated the speaking difficulties of Libyan EFL learners, identifying language and psychological constraints as major hurdles. Lack of exposure to the target language, overemphasis on accuracy, and absence of speaking exercises were contributing factors, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment.

In conclusion, the research studies reviewed offer valuable insights into the intricate interplay between psychological factors, linguistic elements, and speaking achievement among English learners. While existing literature often examines either linguistic or psychological factors in isolation, there exists a notable gap in research that comprehensively integrates both aspects to provide a holistic understanding of speaking difficulties. Bridging this gap could involve integrating findings from studies such as Tok (2009) on psychological obstacles and linguistic factors highlighted in studies like Purnawati (2021).

Furthermore, delving deeper into the influence of cultural and societal factors on speaking proficiency is warranted. Understanding how cultural norms, social conventions, and educational systems impact speaking abilities could inform the design of more effective language learning interventions. Incorporating insights from studies like Gan (2013) on challenges faced by students from diverse cultural backgrounds could enrich this exploration. Moreover, while many studies focus on speaking difficulties among specific groups of learners, such as first-year students or English majors, there is value in exploring how speaking challenges vary across different proficiency levels and learner backgrounds. Studies like Do (2021), Tran and Dang (2019) can offer insights into patterns and variations across diverse learner populations, thereby informing the development of tailored interventions.

While motivation is acknowledged as a crucial factor in language learning, there is a gap in research that explores the relationship between motivation and difficulties in learning English speaking skills and speaking performance among ELF university English majors. Understanding the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as motivational strategies, could inform targeted interventions to enhance speaking skills. Investigate the relationship between motivation and speaking proficiency using studies like Ulla (2020), Menggo (2018) to uncover motivational factors influencing speaking abilities. In summary, addressing these research gaps with evidence from relevant studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of English speaking difficulties among EFL learners.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The research participants were 91 final-year students majoring in English at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade. Specifically, 18 boys and 73 girls were among the study participants, equivalent to 19.8% boys and 80.2% girls.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaire of English Speaking Difficulties (QESD)

The instrument utilized in this study, the Questionnaire of English Speaking Difficulties (QESD), was adapted from Wulandari et al.'s (2022) questionnaire of the students' speaking difficulties based on linguistics problems and the students' speaking difficulties based on psychological Problems, previously adapted from Khamprated's (2012) questionnaire of problems with the English speaking. QESD consists of 25 questions divided into two parts: difficulties in speaking skills based on linguistic problems (Items 01 - 12), and the remainder addresses psychological issues (Items 13 - 25).

3.2.2. Questionnaire of Motivation to Improve English Speaking Skills (QMIESS)

The current study used the Questionnaire of Motivation to Improve English Speaking Skills, which was adapted from Amoah and Yeboah's (2021) questionnaire of integrative motivational orientation factors (Items 01 - 07) and instrumental motivational orientation factors (Items 08 - 15), previously adapted from Prapphal's attitude tests (Prapphal, 1981). The modified scale in this study employs a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to better align with the objectives of the current research to allow for a more nuanced and detailed assessment of the participants' motivation levels concerning improving their speaking skills.

3.2.3. Speaking achievement test score

Students' speaking final test scores were used as an indicator of their speaking achievement. The speaking test was measured on a scale from 1 to 10 and was taken at the end of the third speaking course.

3.3. Data collection procedure

This study employed two survey questionnaires, QESD and QMIESS, to assess the challenges encountered in speaking skills and students' motivation to enhance their speaking abilities. Data was collected on September 4th, 2023, using a Google Form link sent to respondents via final-year students' Zalo study groups. Students' speaking achievement scores were also collected based on the results of the speaking test in their third speaking course of the second semester of the academic year 2022 - 2023. Additionally, participants were assured that their responses were kept confidential.

3.4. Data analysis

The data collected from the survey questionnaire was analyzed and computed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. Mean scores and percentages were reported as part of the analysis to address the research questions. Prayoga and Suryasa.'s (2020) guidelines provide the criteria to determine the level of responses (1:00 - 2.33: low level; 2.34 - 3.67: moderate level; 3.68 - 5:00: high level).

4. Results and discussion

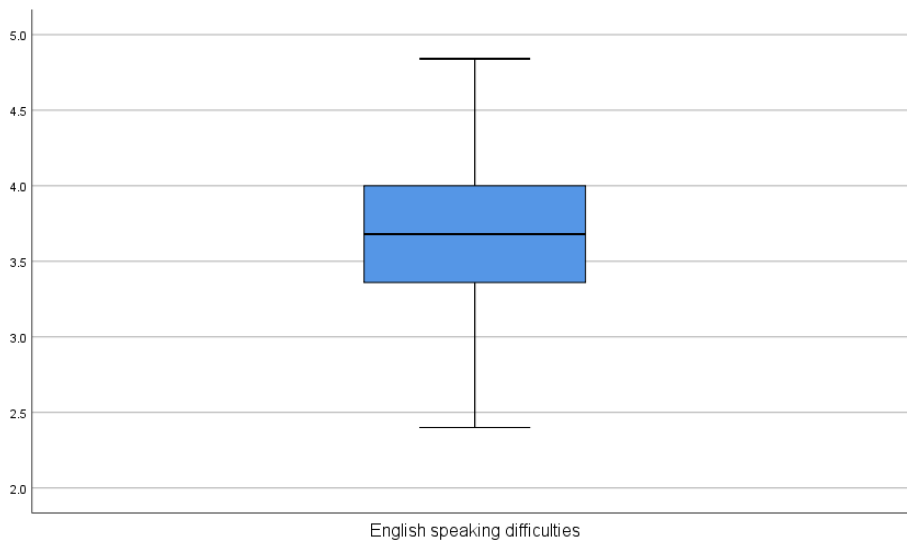
4.1. Outliers and normality tests

According to Cousineau and Chartier (2010), outliers are measures or observations that significantly deviate from most observations, and their presence often raises questions. A commonly used method to identify outliers is based on the boxplot concept. The boxplot, as defined by Hubert and Vandervieren (2008), is a tool for visualizing the continuous, unimodal distribution of data. It provides insights into the data's location, distribution, skewness, and tails.

Figures 1 and 2 show no outliers for both variables: English speaking difficulties and Motivation to Improve English speaking skills.

Figure 1

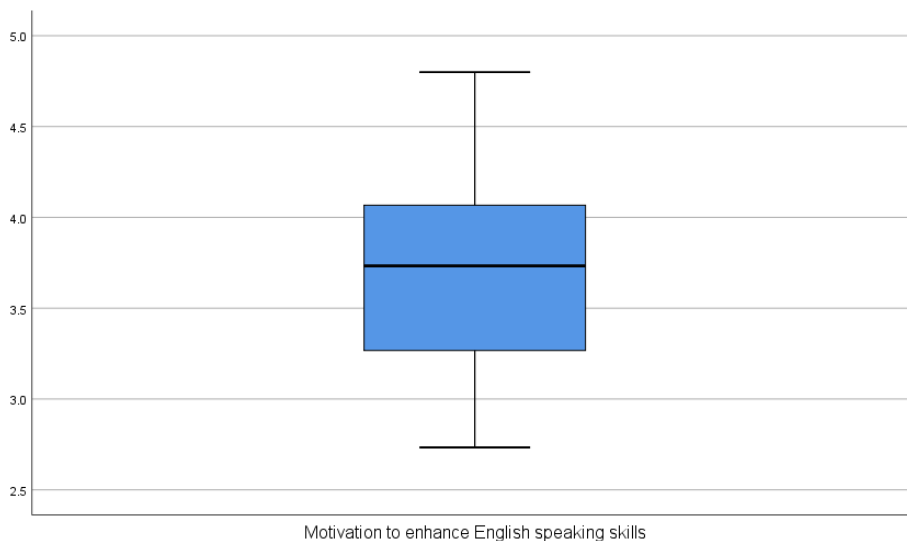
Boxplot for English Speaking Difficulties



Source. Data analysis result of the research

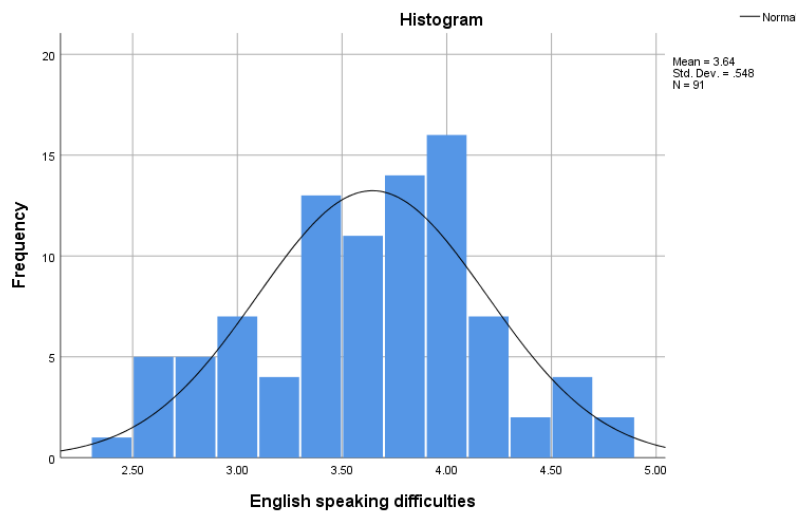
Figure 2

Boxplot for Motivation to Improve English Speaking Skills

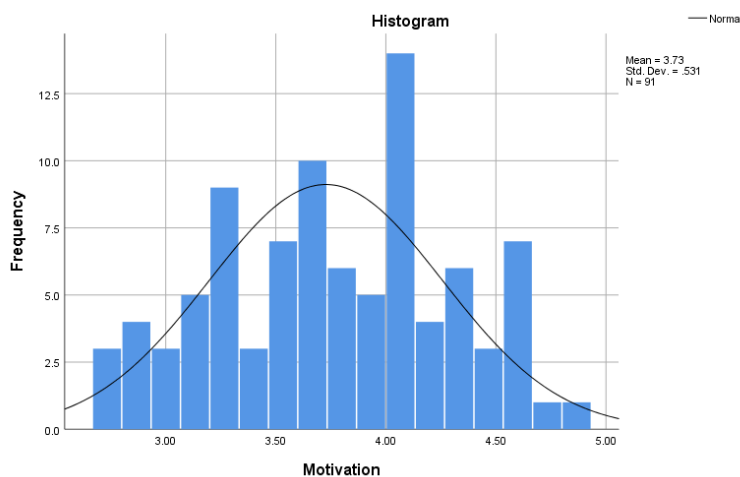


Source. Data analysis result of the research

As Gordon (2006) described, normal distribution is a symmetric probability distribution around the mean. The “mean” represents the measurement’s true or normal value; any deviations from this are considered errors. In this study, the normal distribution is assessed using histograms. A histogram is a graphical representation that displays the frequency of numerical data using rectangles. The height of each rectangle on the vertical axis corresponds to the frequency distribution or the number of times a variable appears. The histograms in Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the bell shape curve for both variables.

Figure 3*Histogram for English Speaking Difficulties*

Source. Data analysis result of the research

Figure 4*Histogram for Motivation to Improve English Speaking Skills*

Source. Data analysis result of the research

Additionally, the Skewness and Kurtosis values for the two variables fall within the range of -1 to +1. Specifically, for the variable English Speaking Difficulties, the Skewness value was -.161, and Kurtosis was -.458. Regarding motivation to improve English speaking skills, the Skewness value was -.052, while Kurtosis's value was -.862. Based on this information, it can be inferred that the research data follows a normal distribution.

4.2. English speaking difficulties

The research findings indicate that final-year students majoring in English face moderate difficulties in their overall speaking skills (overall scale), $M = 3.644$ and $SD = .548$. It is interesting to note that students have similar levels of linguistics ($M = 3.677$, $SD = .546$) and psychological problems ($M = 3.615$, $SD = .656$), and no significant difference between these two factors was detected, $t(90) = 1.152$, $p = .252 > .05$. Also, there is no difference between male and female students in terms of English speaking difficulties, $t(89) = .439$, $p = .662 > .05$. The mean

scores for individual items range from 3.08 to 4.19. Notably, statements 3 (“I have a lack of vocabulary in certain fields”), 6 (“It is difficult for me to speak in complete sentences with correct grammar”), and 16 (“I am afraid of making mistakes while I am speaking”) have the highest means, scoring 4.19, 4.02, and 3.91, respectively. These findings suggest that many students encounter significant difficulties in speaking skills.

Conversely, the lowest means are associated with items 4 (“Sometimes I insert Vietnamese words when speaking English”), 11 (“I find it difficult to pronounce some words correctly, for example, *ʃ* (ship), *tʃ* (Lunch), and *ð* (the)”), and 20 (“I feel more confused when practicing speaking with friends who have lower English proficiency”), with mean values of 3.08, 3.09, and 3.18, respectively. In summary, learners exhibit moderate difficulty in speaking skills.

The previous studies on English speaking difficulties among EFL learners and Vietnamese students highlight several common themes and challenges. Both sets of studies emphasize the importance of linguistic factors such as vocabulary limitations, grammar issues, pronunciation difficulties, and improper vocabulary usage (e.g., Do, 2021; Purnawati, 2021; Trinh & Pham, 2021). Additionally, psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and performance pressure are consistently identified as significant barriers to speaking proficiency (e.g., Fitriati, 2016; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; Tran & Dang, 2019; Vo et al., 2018). The current study, focusing on final-year English majors, reveals moderate difficulties in overall speaking skills, with similar levels of linguistic and psychological problems. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that students face challenges in vocabulary acquisition, grammar usage, pronunciation, and confidence levels when speaking English. Specifically, students express the most significant difficulties in vocabulary limitations, grammar correctness, and fear of making mistakes, while they struggle relatively less with inserting Vietnamese words, pronunciation of specific sounds, and practicing with lower-proficiency peers (e.g., Do, 2021; Mai, 2022; Trinh & Pham, 2021; Vo et al., 2018). Overall, the current study’s findings corroborate previous research, indicating persistent challenges in speaking abilities among English majors despite efforts to address linguistic and psychological factors. These insights underscore the ongoing need for tailored instructional strategies and interventions to enhance speaking proficiency among EFL learners and Vietnamese students alike.

4.3. Motivation to enhance English speaking skills

The research findings suggest that final-year students majoring in English possess a moderate level of motivation to enhance their speaking skills, $M = 3.72$, $SD = .531$. Additionally, the study reveals a moderate level of both integrative motivation ($M = 3.628$, $SD = .559$) and instrumental motivation ($M = 3.815$, $SD = .599$) among these students. There are significant differences in the mean scores between these two factors, $t(90) = 3.780$, $p = .00 < .001$, indicating that students had a higher level of instrumental motivation. However, both genders did not differ in terms of overall motivation, $t(89) = .014$, $p > .05$, and in separate categories, i.e., integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, $t(89) = .730$, $p > .05$ and $t(89) = .618$, $p > .05$ respectively. Among the statements, item 3 (“I push myself to speak as much English as possible to enjoy English movies, literature, pop music, etc.”) exhibits the highest mean ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .87$), indicating that many students find enjoyment in using English in various entertainment contexts, such as movies, literature, and pop music. Additionally, item 2 (“I push myself to speak English to impress people for the job or career prospects”) also appears to motivate students significantly, with a mean of 4.02 and an SD of .75. Furthermore, item 10 (“I set time in a day to learn oral English to pass my English oral test or exam.”) reflects moderate

motivation among students to develop their speaking skills, $M = 3.95$, $SD = .81$, followed by item 16 (“I push myself to speak English to be seen as well educated”) with $M = 3.95$, $SD = .91$.

Items with the lowest means, including item 6 (“I set time in a day speaking English to appreciate the life of native speakers”), $M = 3.31$, $SD = .92$, item 11 (“I push myself to speak English to join the English debating society and other English groups on campus”), $M = 3.42$, $SD = .94$, and item 4 (“I push myself to speak more English than the Vietnamese language during the day”), $M = 3.47$, $SD = .76$.

In previous studies, researchers have consistently highlighted the importance of motivation, both integrative and instrumental, in influencing English language proficiency, particularly in speaking skills (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018; Al-Qahtani, 2013; Alotumi, 2021; Menggo, 2018; Nguyen & Van, 2018; Skripsi, 2019; Ulla, 2020). These previous studies indicate that motivation levels can vary among different groups of learners, with some studies reporting a balanced level of motivation. In contrast, others show higher levels of either intrinsic or instrumental motivation. For example, Amoah and Yeboah (2021) reported a balanced level of motivation among Chinese university students, slightly favoring integrative over instrumental motivation. Conversely, Radfar and Lengkanawati (2020) found high motivation levels among Indonesian English majors, with instrumental motivation prevailing over integrative motivation.

Overall, the current study focuses on final-year students majoring in English and explores their motivation levels in enhancing their speaking skills. The findings reveal a moderate level of motivation among these students, with a higher level of instrumental motivation, consistent with findings for Indonesian English majors reported by Radfar and Lengkanawati (2020). Contrary to Hu and McGeown’s (2020) findings, which found higher value motivation, especially among girls, our study did not record this difference between the two genders. In another sense, both genders experienced a similar level of motivation. Integrative motivation, associated with enjoyment and appreciation of the English language and culture, is evident in statements such as enjoying English movies, literature, and pop music (item 03) and speaking English to appreciate the life of native speakers (item 06). Instrumental motivation, driven by practical goals such as career prospects and passing exams, is reflected in statements such as speaking English to impress people for job prospects (item 02) and setting time to learn oral English for exams (item 10).

4.4. Relationship between English speaking difficulties, motivation in learning English speaking skills and speaking achievement

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the relationship between two variables: difficulties in speaking skills and speaking achievement among final-year students. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = .336$, $p < .01$), indicating that as difficulties in speaking skills increase, speaking achievement tends to increase as well, or vice versa. This finding sheds light on the connection between challenges in speaking skills and their impact on students’ speaking achievements.

Furthermore, no significant correlations were found between English speaking difficulties and speaking motivation ($r = .023$, $p > .05$), nor between speaking motivation and speaking achievement ($r = .100$, $p > .05$), as indicated in Table 2. Despite encountering challenges in English speaking, Vietnamese university students maintain their motivation to learn and improve their English speaking skills. This lack of significant correlation suggests that the difficulties in speaking English do not necessarily diminish students’ overall motivation for language learning. It underscores the resilience of their commitment to enhancing their speaking abilities.

Table 1*Pearson Correlation between English-Speaking Achievement and Speaking Difficulties*

Correlations			
	Difficulties	Motivation	Speaking score
Difficulties	1	.023	-.336**
Motivation	.023	1	.100
Speaking score	-.336**	.100	1

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The data are from the analysis result of the research

In summary, the findings suggest that difficulties in English-speaking skills influence students' achievement in this area. The correlation indicates that as difficulties in speaking skills increase, speaking achievement tends to decrease, and vice versa. This result aligns somewhat with studies conducted by Al-Khotaba et al. (2020), Tridinanti (2018). Still, it extends beyond previous research by considering a broader range of difficulties, including linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Jaya et al.'s (2022) survey study, focusing on students' speaking ability, problems, and contributing factors, yielded results consistent with the current study. Their findings identified linguistic and social problems, along with psychological factors like anxiety and confidence, as contributors to speaking difficulties and subsequent impacts on students' speaking outcomes. Factors such as lack of practice, fear of mistakes, low motivation, and shyness were highlighted as significant challenges.

In comparison to previous studies, the findings of the current study offer a unique perspective on the relationship between speaking difficulties, speaking motivation, and speaking achievement among Vietnamese university students learning English as a foreign language. Unlike prior research that demonstrated positive correlations between motivation and language achievement (e.g., Fatimah & Sale, 2019; Hu & McGeown, 2020), the current study found no significant correlation between speaking difficulties and speaking motivation, nor between speaking motivation and speaking achievement (Ahmetovic et al., 2020). While previous studies emphasized the importance of motivation in predicting language achievement, the current findings highlight the nuanced nature of motivation in the face of challenges. It suggests that motivation to learn English may persist even when students encounter difficulties, indicating a multifaceted relationship between motivation, language difficulties, and language achievement. Further research could delve deeper into understanding the factors that contribute to this resilience and explore how educators can support and nurture students' motivation in the face of challenges to facilitate language learning and achievement.

5. Conclusion, limitations, and recommendations for further studies

In summary, the study reveals that final-year English major students at HUIT encounter moderate difficulties in speaking skills, primarily in linguistic aspects. The findings align with similar challenges identified in previous studies across various contexts. Despite linguistic and psychological problems, students exhibit a generally moderate level of motivation to enhance speaking skills, emphasizing diverse motivations. Notably, a significant correlation is noted between difficulties in speaking skills and speaking achievement, highlighting the interconnected nature of these factors. However, no correlation was found between speaking difficulties and motivation nor between motivation and speaking achievement. This research underscores the

complexity of language learning, urging educators to adopt holistic strategies to address diverse challenges and motivations in fostering effective speaking skills among students.

The limitations of this study include relying on only questionnaires, lack of classroom observations, and a narrow focus on final-year students, potentially limiting generalizability. Also, there was unequal distribution of genders in the study. Thus, the study calls for diverse research methods, broader participant representation, and improved tools. Despite these constraints, the research offers valuable insights for English learners. Recommendations involve creating a supportive learning environment, promoting active participation, and utilizing creative teaching methods. The study underscores the pivotal role of teachers in helping students overcome speaking difficulties. Future research should consider contextual factors for nuanced conclusions. In essence, this study provides a foundational exploration for enhancing speaking skills and the learning environment for senior English majors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages.

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