

A Needs Analysis of Speaking Skills for Law Students at Islamic University of Riau

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received : May 19, 2025

Revised : June 30, 2025

Accepted : July 2, 2025

Available online : July 2, 2025

Keywords:

Analysis; Speaking Skills

Abstract

This study investigates the internal and external constraints faced by law students at the Islamic University of Riau in developing their English speaking skills. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires administered to 37 students enrolled in the English for Law Students course during the 2023/2024 academic year. The findings reveal that internal barriers, particularly speaking anxiety (68%) and fear of making mistakes (62%), significantly hinder students' oral proficiency. Externally, insufficient opportunities for speaking practice (62%) and learning materials that lack relevance to legal contexts (57%) also contribute to the challenges encountered. The study underscores the necessity for psychological support and pedagogical adjustments, recommending communicative and context-based teaching methods tailored to legal English. Such interventions aim to enhance students' confidence and speaking performance, preparing them for the demands of the global legal profession. This research highlights the multidimensional nature of language learning obstacles and calls for integrated strategies addressing both affective and contextual factors.

INTRODUCTION

The process of learning English encompasses the development of essential skills, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Anderson., 2019). To improve oral language proficiency, it is expected that the use of diverse materials, methods, techniques, and activities will encourage students to participate actively in authentic communicative situations. Historically, and continuing into the present, English language curricula at colleges and universities have consistently emphasized conversational language. In practical contexts, speaking is regarded as the most critical skill, and it is the one for which students are most often evaluated (Roever C, Kasper G., 2018).

Effective communication is fundamental to success within the legal profession. For law students, proficiency in speaking is essential not only for academic success but also for their prospective careers as legal professionals. The capacity to articulate legal arguments, present cases with clarity, and engage in persuasive discourse are critical competencies that directly influence their professional efficacy. The rise of globalization, particularly through free trade agreements with various nations, including the United States—where many negotiations take place—has underscored the necessity for English proficiency. Consequently, our organization has established English fluency

as a key criterion for certain positions and as a prerequisite for opportunities in international work (Rahayu SR., 2020).

It is the responsibility of the teacher to prepare students to communicate effectively in English in real-world contexts beyond the classroom and exams. Achieving both fluency and accuracy in English remains a significant challenge for students learning it as a foreign language. Limited speaking abilities, coupled with the fear of misunderstandings, cause some students to be reluctant to express their opinions in class. Consequently, they may appear reserved and anxious, and they seldom seek clarification on topics they find unclear (Mandasari B. et al., 2020)

At the Islamic University of Riau, fostering speaking skills among law students is of particular significance, reflecting the university's dedication to equipping graduates for success in a competitive global legal landscape. However, there remains a clear gap in understanding the specific needs and challenges these students encounter in developing their speaking abilities. The existing English language curriculum may not adequately address the practical speaking demands crucial for legal practice.

Based on students' experiences learning English from junior high school through university, they face significant challenges in speaking the language. Many students struggle to understand and follow the lecturer's speech, leading them to remain silent during lessons. Difficulties in comprehending vocabulary and expressing themselves verbally in the target language are common among language learners. Each student encounters unique obstacles when speaking English as a foreign language, particularly at the Islamic University of Riau. Identifying effective strategies to address these issues is crucial. Consequently, the author seeks to investigate these speaking challenges and the factors influencing students' speaking performance. The study aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the internal constraints faced by students when speaking English?
2. What are the external constraints faced by students when speaking English?

METHOD

In this study, the author will utilize a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research is characterized by the presentation of findings in a narrative form and the use of guiding questions to evaluate various processes. Researchers and reviewers are supported by tools such as principles and flowcharts to aid in navigating the study design and review process (Syakur Abd, et al., 2020). The primary aim of descriptive qualitative research is to provide a detailed account of the processes and strategies used in data analysis and interpretation. This study will be conducted at the Islamic University of Riau, focusing on Law Students for the 2023/2024 academic year. Data collection will be carried out through a questionnaire specifically designed to identify the issues and factors affecting students' English-speaking abilities. The author will administer the questionnaire to gather insights into the challenges students encounter in learning to speak English.

The participants in this study were enrolled in the English for Law Students, class O. A purposive sampling method was employed, whereby participants were deliberately selected to address the specific research problem. The entire class of 37 students was included as subjects in this study.

In the research process, the author will use a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. To gather the necessary information, the author distributed these questionnaires to students at the Islamic University of Riau. Before distribution, the questionnaire was carefully prepared and reviewed by experts. The questionnaire is specifically designed to explore the issues and factors affecting students' speaking performance at the university. It consists of thirteen questions, divided into two sections: the first section gathers demographic information, while the second focuses on the factors influencing speaking performance and the challenges associated with it. After the initial

design, the author sought expert feedback to validate the questionnaire, followed by revisions based on this input. Before students completed the questionnaire, detailed oral instructions and explanations were provided to avoid any misunderstandings. The completed questionnaires were then collected for analysis.

In qualitative research, data analysis involves the processes of categorizing, describing, and synthesizing information. In this study, the author employed descriptive methods to present the findings and synthesized data collected from observations, notes, and student questionnaires. The data were carefully selected, simplified, and organized to facilitate the author's ability to understand, interpret, and extract meaningful insights.

The data were collected based on the classification of the research questions, using qualitative procedures that involved describing the data in words. This analysis also took into account factors such as sudden ideas, the author's limited memory, and other considerations. It provided a step-by-step approach to data analysis. Once all data were collected, the procedures for analyzing the data were established, including data collection, reduction, and display. Data reduction was performed to eliminate irrelevant information and retain relevant data.

FINDINGS

Based on the quantitative data analysis from questionnaires distributed to 37 Law students in class O at the Islamic University of Riau, it was found that both internal and external constraints significantly affect students' English speaking abilities. Specifically, 68% of respondents reported experiencing anxiety when speaking, which impacts their confidence, while 54% admitted that limited vocabulary is a major obstacle in expressing their opinions verbally. These findings align with foreign language learning theories that emphasize affective factors such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes as primary barriers to speaking skills development (Bennett et al., 2025).

Furthermore, 62% of the students identified a lack of speaking practice opportunities in class as an external factor impeding their speaking development. This indicates that traditional teaching methods, which place less emphasis on active communication, result in students being less trained to speak spontaneously and naturally. This supports Dessler's (2020) view on the importance of communicative and authentic-based learning methods to improve speaking skills.

Moreover, insufficient learning materials relevant to the legal context also emerged as a significant external constraint, with 57% of students stating that the English materials taught do not adequately meet their practical needs in the legal field. This creates a mismatch between the curriculum and professional demands, especially in facing negotiations and international communications increasingly important due to globalization and free trade agreements (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Table: 1 Distribution of Students' Responses Regarding Internal Constraints in English Speaking (n=37)

Internal Constraints	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Anxiety when speaking	25	68
Lack of self-confidence	22	59
Difficulty pronouncing words	18	49
Limited vocabulary	20	54
Fear of making mistakes	23	62

Table: 2 Distribution of Students’ Responses Regarding External Constraints in English Speaking (n=37)

External Constraints	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lack of speaking practice opportunities	23	62
Learning materials not relevant to legal context	21	57
Teaching methods are not communicative enough	19	51
Unsupportive learning environment	15	41

From the data above, it can be concluded that the most dominant internal barriers to students’ speaking abilities are anxiety (68%) and fear of making mistakes (62%). This highlights the need for psychological intervention in English learning, especially concerning speaking anxiety.

Meanwhile, from external factors, lack of speaking practice opportunities was the main obstacle (62%), followed by curriculum materials that do not align well with the legal context (57%). This indicates that curriculum and teaching methods need to be more oriented toward the practical needs of law students in order to effectively develop their speaking skills.

The following charts illustrate the percentage of internal and external constraints faced by students in speaking English:

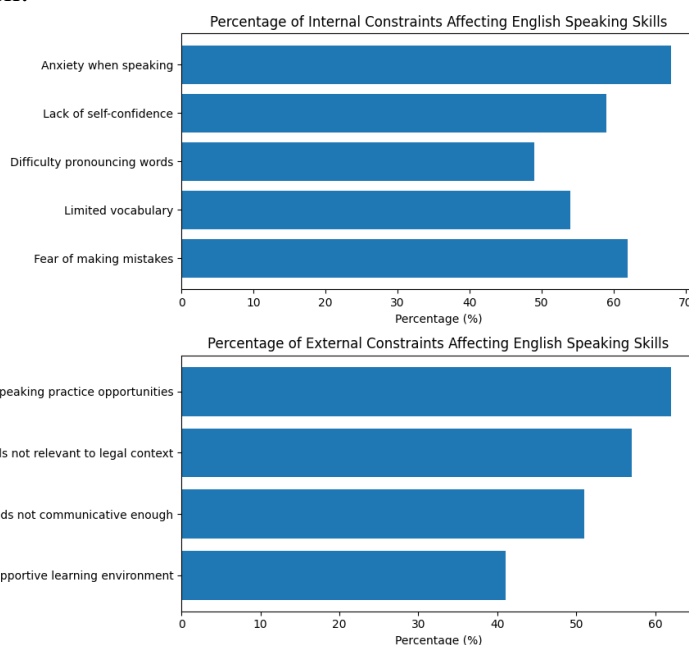


Figure 1: Percentage of External Obstacles in English Language Learning

The interpretation of these findings emphasizes that internal barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence cannot be separated from external conditions, including teaching methods and less contextualized materials. Learning approaches focusing only on cognitive aspects without addressing psychological and environmental factors are insufficient to optimally develop law students’ English speaking proficiency.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the understanding that successful foreign language acquisition is a dynamic interaction between internal learner factors and external learning environment factors (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, holistic learning strategies are essential to overcome these obstacles.

Practically, these results recommend that English instructors at the Islamic University of Riau adopt more communicative and contextualized teaching approaches, such as legal negotiation

simulations, case-based discussions, and intensive speaking practices relevant to the legal profession. Additionally, training in managing speaking anxiety should be provided to boost students' confidence. Such steps are expected to enhance active participation and significantly improve their speaking performance.

Overall, this study confirms that developing English speaking skills among law students is a multidimensional challenge requiring integrated interventions addressing both psychological and pedagogical aspects. Consequently, efforts to improve English competence must be systematically implemented so graduates are ready to compete globally in the legal profession, which increasingly demands international communication skills.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that law students at the Islamic University of Riau face considerable challenges in developing their English speaking skills, influenced by both internal and external constraints. The most dominant internal constraints include anxiety (68%) and fear of making mistakes (62%), while externally, lack of speaking practice (62%) and non-contextual learning materials (57%) emerge as major barriers. These results reflect persistent problems in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, especially among students whose disciplines demand high-level oral communication skills, such as law.

Internal Constraints: Anxiety and Fear

Language learning anxiety has long been identified as a key affective factor impeding speaking performance. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety arising from the unique demands of language learning. This concept is supported by more recent findings from Tuncel (2021), who found that university students with higher levels of anxiety tended to participate less in oral tasks and were more prone to silence during speaking assessments. Additionally, Yan and Wang (2023) emphasize that fear of negative evaluation often inhibits students from taking speaking risks in class, especially in high-stakes disciplines like law.

The fear of making mistakes, as shown in the current study, is another significant internal obstacle. Students often associate errors with failure, which diminishes their willingness to speak. This is consistent with the findings of Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2021), who argue that perfectionism and fear of judgment contribute significantly to students' reluctance to speak in English. Such findings underscore the importance of creating a supportive, error-tolerant classroom environment.

External Constraints: Instructional Methods and Contextual Relevance

Externally, the lack of speaking opportunities in class is a key finding. This reflects the traditional teacher-centered approaches that dominate many EFL classrooms in Indonesia (Rahmawati et al., 2022). Students are often passive recipients rather than active communicators. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles suggest that learners improve speaking skills most effectively when engaged in meaningful, interactive tasks (Richards, 2006).

Moreover, this study highlights the insufficiency of English materials contextualized to the legal profession. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) literature supports this notion, asserting that learners' motivation and performance improve when materials are tailored to their academic and professional goals (Basturkmen, 2020). Without such contextualization, law students are unlikely to transfer their language skills to real-world legal settings.

Integration of Internal and External Factors

Crucially, internal and external factors interact dynamically. Anxiety may be exacerbated by ineffective pedagogy or irrelevant materials. As Xie and Derakhshan (2023) suggest, reducing learners' anxiety requires not only psychological strategies but also pedagogical reforms that emphasize authenticity, relevance, and interaction. For instance, the use of mock trials or legal debates has proven effective in developing both fluency and confidence among law students (Hamouda, 2021).

Implications for Teaching Practice

In light of these findings, educators should implement an integrated approach combining psychological support and practical language instruction. Activities such as simulation of legal proceedings, peer collaboration, and anxiety-reduction workshops have been shown to foster better speaking outcomes (Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2020). Instructors must be trained to recognize the emotional dimensions of language learning and adapt their teaching accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that both internal and external factors substantially impact the English speaking abilities of law students at the Islamic University of Riau. Internally, anxiety and fear of errors are primary barriers, limiting students' willingness to actively participate in oral communication. Externally, the lack of sufficient speaking practice and non-contextualized learning materials reduce the effectiveness of language acquisition in the legal field. These findings indicate a gap between current curriculum provisions and the practical language needs of law students, especially in the context of globalization and international legal interactions. To address these challenges, the study recommends implementing teaching strategies that combine psychological support for anxiety management with communicative, contextually relevant activities such as legal negotiation simulations and case discussions. Such an integrated approach is essential to develop students' speaking competence effectively, ultimately enabling them to compete professionally in a global legal environment.

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