

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

This chapter presents research findings based on data collected through interviews with four participants who had completed the Academic Speaking course. The participants were selected based on their high performance in the course. The interview data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis, which focuses on identifying recurring themes while preserving the participants' personal experiences and perceived meanings. Each participant is given their initials as P1, P2, P3, and P4.

Research Question 1: How do students describe their experiences of facing challenges in English conversation in academic speaking courses?

Based on the thematic narrative analysis of interview data, two major themes emerged related to students' challenges:

- (1) Linguistic challenges
- (2) Psychosocial challenges

1. Linguistic Challenges

Good speaking ability cannot be separated from mastery of the main linguistic components: vocabulary and grammar. These components work simultaneously when a person speaks, a speaker must choose the right words, arrange them in correct grammatical structures,

and pronounce them in a way that can be understood by their conversation partner, all within a very short time and in real-time.

a. Lack of Vocabulary

All four participants consistently identified lack of vocabulary as the most significant obstacle they encountered in the Academic Speaking course. This challenge affected not only their ability to produce speech but also their comprehension during classroom interactions. P1 narrated:

“My experience in the Academic Speaking course often involved conversations in English. The difficulty I often encountered was understanding the meaning or the topic being discussed. I especially felt my vocabulary is limited.”

P1’s explanation indicates that limited vocabulary creates a double barrier, one that hinders both the speaking process and direct comprehension, thereby preventing them from fully participating in classroom interactions. P2 also describes how a lack of vocabulary causes hesitation when performing speaking tasks:

“I feel like my vocabulary is limited, but I feel like I can pronounce words well, but when I’m asked to answer in English, I forget what I should say, so I need to expand my vocabulary, it needs to be improved.”

This experience of a momentary language barrier was also described by P4, who specifically described the difficulty of

recalling words spontaneously when asked to speak in front of the class:

“When I was asked to come to the front, I felt confused. I didn’t know what words to use.”

Collectively, these narratives illustrate that limited vocabulary directly affects students' confidence and fluency in speaking situations within an academic setting.

P3 also reported a similar experience during a role-playing assignment:

“I felt it was difficult when I got a roleplay assignment, I felt like I didn't understand the context of the assignment, then I got a partner who wasn't on the same frequency with me, the vocabulary he used was different, I felt like my partner had a better grasp of the vocabulary for the discussion.”

He struggled because the role assigned to him required vocabulary and discourse conventions beyond his ability, especially when he was paired with a classmate who appeared more fluent in the language.

b. Grammar Difficulties

P2 specifically identified confusion over verb tense selection as a recurring difficulty:

"I also find it difficult with grammar, it's hard to place things like present/past tenses like this, what tense should I use, and that's sometimes still confusing."

P2's difficulty in choosing the correct tense accurately reflects the type of grammatical uncertainty that arises when speakers must simultaneously manage both the content of a message and its formal linguistic structure. Her confusion is not a reflection of ignorance of tense rules, but rather her inability to apply them automatically under the cognitive pressure of spontaneous speech.

P4 articulated the grammar challenge in terms of the fundamental contrast between spoken and written production:

"In writing, I can correct grammar first, but in speaking I must answer directly. I don't feel like I'm the type who's fluent in speaking, I prefer writing, I don't like interacting directly. I also find it difficult in the grammar section because I have to be spontaneous, so I can't think first like when writing, it can be corrected, I feel better in pronunciation, I also likes the subject."

P4's narrative clearly highlights the difference between writing and speaking: writing can be revised, while speaking is immediate and irreversible. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that she admits to preferring writing, so the demands of spontaneous grammar in speaking feel particularly challenging to her.

P3's narrative added a further dimension to this challenge by linking topic difficulty to task type. He described how role-play tasks posed particular challenges because they required not only vocabulary and grammar, but also background knowledge and familiarity with the conventions of a specific discourse context. When assigned a role-play scenario involving a character who was a fluent English speaker with a particular accent, he struggled significantly because the task required linguistic resources beyond his current repertoire.

2. Psychosocial Challenges

Aside from facing linguistic challenges, students also often encounter psychological and social barriers when speaking English in class. They termed it “foreign language anxiety,” which refers to feelings of fear, tension, and discomfort that specifically arise when someone has to use a foreign language in a learning situation.

a. Communication Apprehension

P4 shared a very anxious experience regarding the anxiety they felt when asked to speak in front of the class:

"When I was asked to come to the front, I felt confused. I didn't know what words to use."

P4 further recounted that when asked to speak in front of class causing her to experience what she described as going blank. P4 also noted that although she generally enjoyed the course, the

atmosphere of formal assessment consistently triggered an anxiety response that was qualitatively different and more intense:

“I felt nervous when speaking in class even though I already knew the people in the class.”

This suggests that even familiarity among classmates does not completely eliminate anxiety related to the evaluative dimension of academic speaking performance.

P3 also acknowledged nervousness at the beginning of the course, though he noted that this gradually decreased as he became more comfortable with the classroom environment:

"I was nervous at first when talking to the lecturer, but over time I felt comfortable talking to the lecturer until I felt like I was talking too much.”

P3's narrative is significant because it demonstrates that communication apprehension is not static but is a dynamic emotional state that can be reduced through sustained exposure to a supportive learning environment.

b. Test Anxiety

The P4 narrative most clearly illustrates the combined effects of test anxiety and fear of speaking in the context of oral assessment:

“During the middle test of speaking, there were only student and the lecturer, so I felt intimidated, I found it difficult because of direct eye contact with the lecturer, I felt blank and nervous, talking

to friends was the same. I felt inferior in class if I had difficulties, for example, when I was practicing and suddenly went blank.”

The structure of the face-to-face oral exam, which reinforced P4’s feeling of being under direct evaluative scrutiny, thereby triggering a “blank-out” experience described as characteristic of test anxiety in the context of language learning.

P2 described a contrasting experience, where the non-judgmental atmosphere created by both the lecturer and classmates effectively buffered against test anxiety:

"When facing difficulties in speaking, I don't feel anything, because the situation/environment around me is also supportive, not judging either from the lecturer or from classmates, not putting each other down, even though the friend who is answering/coming forward has shortcomings or mistakes, no one is put down. For example, when asked what you do in your free time, i am one of those asked to answer/pointed to, there is a moment when I am confused about what else to say, so it's like thinking for a while, I was silent, but none of my friends looked down on me, so I could continue without feeling burdened by thoughts (oh I was wrong... oh I will be judged less...) so it's safe. The effect is only for a moment like embarrassment for not being able to give my best when answering, so it goes back to each individual so that they can change the feeling of embarrassment/fear to try to be able to learn again, so

I prefer to improve what is lacking in me rather than feeling insecure.”

P2's narrative demonstrates that while fear of negative evaluation was a common experience, the degree to which it inhibited participation was significantly moderated by the perceived social safety of the classroom environment. Together, these narratives illustrate that anxiety and fear of judgment are multifaceted experiences shaped by both internal psychological factors and external social dynamics.

P2 reflected on the time pressure of structured speaking tasks with minimum duration requirements:

"We were once asked to answer questions with a time limit (for example, a minimum of ½ minute), Sometimes we still can't make it within the duration given, so we have to think again about what needs to be said. "

P2's experience points to the added cognitive burden created by performance constraints, where students must not only produce language spontaneously but also sustain it for a specified duration.

c. Fear of Negative Evaluation

P4 described the fear of being silently judged by peers and the instructor during moments of communicative difficulty:

“When speaking and then going blank, I felt afraid of being judged because I suddenly fell silent, I am afraid of people's eyes on me.”

P4's experience captures the essence of fear of negative evaluation, the awareness that one's communicative failures are visible to others generates a sense of social exposure and vulnerability that compounds the cognitive difficulty of the speaking task itself. The experience of going blank in front of peers is not only a linguistic problem but also a social one, as it is immediately interpretable by others as evidence of inadequacy.

P1's experience with communication anxiety is influenced by specific social concerns, not merely a fear of linguistic failure, but a fear of social exclusion by peers due to being perceived as the lecturer's favorite student:

"I feel like I'm often appointed by the lecturer, even though I feel like my vocabulary is limited, I usually feel afraid of being avoided by my friends because I'm afraid my friends think I'm the lecturer's favorite student because I'm often being pointed out, even though the others can/are good at it too.”

These findings reveal a dimension of fear of negative evaluation, the anxiety that arises from being evaluated positively by a lecturer and the fear of the social consequences of that positive evaluation among peers. In collectivist cultural contexts, standing

out can carry social risks that generate its own form of evaluative anxiety.

P3 added that the level of difficulty he experienced in spontaneous speaking was closely tied to topic familiarity:

"Sometimes I find it difficult, sometimes easy depending on the topic. I've been given a difficult topic during roleplay (I felt like I didn't know the technical aspects and also lacked vocabulary). But I've also been given the freedom to choose a topic during the IELTS, so I found it easy."

P3's narrative suggests that spontaneous speaking challenges are not uniform but are mediated by students' prior knowledge and familiarity with the subject matter being discussed.

Research Question 2: How do students explain the strategies they use to overcome those challenges in academic speaking courses?

The analysis of participants' narratives revealed three major themes of strategies employed to overcome speaking challenges: (1) Message adjustment strategies, (2) Achievement strategies, (3) Time gaining strategies

1. Message Adjustment Strategies

When students cannot express something in the way they would like to, they adapt their speech, for example, by using simpler words or reducing the complexity of their sentences.

a. Using Simpler Words and Paraphrasing

The most commonly reported message adjustment strategy across participants was the use of simpler or more familiar words as substitutes when more precise vocabulary was unavailable. This strategy allowed participants to maintain communication flow despite lexical limitations.

P1 described this strategy clearly:

"If I forgot the vocabulary, I used easier daily words, like Everyday language/more frequently used language "

P1's approach classify as approximation, the use of a semantically related or simpler alternative when the precise target word is unavailable. Rather than stopping the conversation entirely, P1 redirected his communicative effort toward words that were more readily accessible, allowing the interaction to continue without a prolonged breakdown. P2 expressed a similar approach, framing it as actively searching for alternative expressions:

"How to continue speaking When you have difficulty, try to be blunt (for example, if you want to say something, but you don't know how to express it in English, you can look for other alternatives/other sentences that you can say). Just look for something easy, don't get stuck because you feel like you can't do it anymore, so you're stuck there just thinking about how you can't do it, so look for easier sentences."

P2's narrative highlights a deliberate cognitive process of reformulation, rather than becoming stuck on a missing word, she redirected her communicative effort toward finding an accessible alternative expression.

P4 also confirmed the use of this strategy, framing it specifically as a response to the experience of going blank:

“One way to deal with blanks is to look for other words or easier words.”

She described using simpler words as a strategy for managing moments of blankness, noting that the primary goal was to keep the conversation moving rather than to achieve linguistic precision.

P3, however, offered a slightly different variation of this strategy. Rather than simply substituting words, he described using circumlocutory expressions, by describing what he meant rather than using the exact term to ensure his interlocutor understood his intended meaning.

2. Achievement Strategies

Several of the most common forms of achievement strategies, including: circumlocution (describing something at length because one does not know the exact word, for example, saying “the thing you use to cut a paper” when forgetting the word “scissors”), approximation (using a word whose meaning is close to the intended one, for example, using

“vehicle” when forgetting the word “motorcycle”), code-switching (temporarily switching to one’s first language), and appeal for help (asking the conversation partner for help) The essence of all these strategies is that the speaker does not give up in their effort to deliver the message

a. Asking for Help and Clarification

The most consistently reported achievement strategy across all participants was asking for help, actively seeking linguistic assistance from conversation partners, peers, lecturers, or digital resources when they encountered words or expressions they could not produce independently.

P1 described how he relied on his conversation partner during paired speaking activities:

"If I forget what I want to say, I can ask the person I'm talking to (for example: what is the English for this word), so once I get what it means, I'll repeat it."

P1's strategy recruit the interlocutor as an active participant in solving the communicative problem. Notably, P1 did not stop after receiving the word but repeated it in context, which also served a memory reinforcement function, transforming a momentary communicative fix into a small learning event.

P2 described a more structured and socially layered approach to help-seeking, reflecting a graduated hierarchy of assistance:

"Lecturers can also help when students are having trouble, if we are stuck, we can ask the lecturer for help (example: miss, how do you say this in English?) and if I don't understand what the lecturer/friend is saying, I will ask a friend next to me, and if we both don't know the meaning, before asking the lecturer, I can search on Google Translate first, because I feel embarrassed to ask in the middle of the lesson, and the last option is to ask the lecturer."

P2's strategy reveals that seeking help was not a single act but a layered process, consulting a peer first for social comfort, then turning to a digital resource, and approaching the lecturer only as a final option, suggesting a degree of reluctance to ask the instructor directly in the middle of a lesson.

P3 agrees that if he get stuck while speaking, he can ask a friend for support so he can remember. P4 also reported a similar pattern, preferring to first seek clarification from a classmate sitting nearby before directing a question to the lecturer:

"I can ask my lecturer/friend to help me correct my words (example: what is the English word for this...), if I don't understand what my lecturer is saying, I can ask my friend next to me first, but I can also directly ask the lecturer what he/she means."

These narratives indicate that peer support functioned as a primary safety net for students navigating linguistic challenges,

while instructor assistance was viewed as a more formal and socially significant act of help-seeking.

b. Language Switching (Code-Switching)

P3 articulated this strategy and its function most clearly:

"When I speak with friends, I can mix languages. If I forget what I want to say in English, I immediately switch to Bahasa. I once spoke to a supervisor and was told to use English, but because I was stuttering, I switched to Bahasa. Code switching helps me to continue my speech."

P3's narrative frames code-switching not as a failure of language learning, but as a deliberate conversational management tool, a way of keeping the topic alive when a full English-only exchange would have stalled. He also noted that his academic adviser had once redirected him from Indonesian back to English during a speaking session. P3's instinctive switch to Indonesian was a genuine strategic response to communicative breakdown, not a sign of unwillingness to use English.

3. Time-Gaining Strategies

Time-gaining strategies are strategies used by speakers to gain more time to think while speaking, without having to stop speaking entirely or give up their turn to speak to the conversation partner. When students are speaking and suddenly forget a word, get confused about

how to continue a sentence, or need time to formulate their ideas, they use these strategies to keep the conversation flowing naturally.

a. Using Filler Words and Pauses

Participants also reported the strategic use of filler words and pauses as a time-gaining mechanism during speaking tasks. This strategy allowed them to sustain their turn in the conversation while processing language and retrieving the needed words or expressions.

P3 articulated the communicative function of fillers most explicitly:

"Using fillers helped me remember what I wanted to say. I also using English term, (example: like... you know...). Once, when making the final video, I forgot the English word that I wanted to say, so I did fillers while thinking and then remembered the word."

He further shared a concrete example from his final project video, in which he momentarily forgot the English word for "cat." Rather than stopping abruptly, he continued producing filler expressions such as "like" and "you know" while searching his memory, and eventually retrieved the target word. This narrative illustrates how fillers function not merely as hesitation markers but as active cognitive strategies that buy processing time without sacrificing the speaker's conversational turn. Furthermore, the lecturer says if possible, don't use fillers, and don't be repetitive, but he felt like he couldn't do it, he had no choice but to use fillers.

P2 similarly noted that pausing were effective tools when she needed a moment to think of the right expression, particularly during tasks with time constraints:

“We were once asked to answer questions with a minimum duration (for example, half a minute). Sometimes we still couldn't reach the given duration and had to think again about what needed to be said.”

P2's account adds a performance-constraint dimension to the time-gaining strategy discussion: when students were required to sustain speech for a minimum duration, the cognitive challenge of filling that time while maintaining communicative quality intensified the need for strategies that could buy processing time without completely stopping the flow of speech.

P4 also described a calming technique, consciously slowing down and composing herself as a form of self-regulation that functioned similarly to time-gaining strategies:

“The way to deal with suddenly going blank is to calm yourself first, because the main problem is nervousness. If we can eliminate the nervousness, the words suddenly come. I feel that when facing difficulties, we should keep talking rather than falling completely silent.”

P4's strategy of self-calming before and during speaking reflects an affective dimension of time-gaining. Her insight that the

primary obstacle is nervousness, and that managing the emotional state can restore lexical access, gaining strategies in EFL academic speaking contexts operate not only at the cognitive level but also at the affective level.

B. Discussion

This chapter examines the study's findings in connection to the theoretical framework and previous studies described in Chapter II. The goal of this discussion is to interpret how students describe their experiences of facing challenges in English conversation and how they explain the strategies they use to overcome those challenges in the Academic Speaking course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The discussion is organized around the two research questions, linking interview findings to applicable theories, particularly, Thornbury (2005) through his book "How to Teach Speaking", Horwitz et al. (1986) framework on foreign language anxiety and speaking challenges, and Dörnyei & Lee Scott (1997) taxonomy of communication strategies.

1. Students' Experiences of Facing Challenges in English Conversation in Academic Speaking Course

The findings indicate that students experienced two types of challenges: linguistic challenges and psychosocial challenges. These two types of challenges are closely interrelated, and together they influence how students participate in the Academic Speaking course.

Thornbury (2005) argued that in order to speak well, students must use vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation simultaneously, without pausing to think. The findings of this study are consistent with this view, as the participants reported experiencing difficulties in all three aspects.

Among all linguistic challenges, limited vocabulary was the biggest challenge for the four participants. Vocabulary is the foundation of speaking, without sufficient words, students cannot express their ideas clearly, even if they understand some grammatical rules. There is also a significant difference between the words students can recognize when they read or hear them and the words they can actually use when speaking spontaneously. This gap is evident in all participants' experiences and has also been confirmed by Franscy & Ramli (2022) as well as Sadewi et al. (2024), who found that EFL students in Indonesia consistently struggle to remember, understand, and use new words in real conversations. P3's experience adds a crucial point that the issue is not merely a lack of general vocabulary knowledge, but a lack of specific vocabulary needed for particular role-play tasks. This suggests that vocabulary learning in Academic Speaking courses must focus not only on everyday words but also on vocabulary specific to various speaking tasks and contexts.

Grammar is also a continuous challenge, especially when students have to speak without preparation. Students often struggle to determine which verb form to use and points out that grammar is much

harder to control in speaking than in writing, because when speaking, there is no chance to pause and correct mistakes before they are heard. This is precisely because grammar in speaking must be used automatically. Students must be able to apply grammar rules quickly and naturally under real-time pressure, not just remember them when given time to think. Kulsum et al. (2024) and Maji et al. (2022) both found that EFL students make more grammatical errors when speaking spontaneously, which confirms that the challenge is not a lack of knowledge of grammatical rules, but rather an inability to use them automatically under the cognitive pressure of direct conversation.

Beyond the language challenge itself, all participants also experienced emotional and social barriers when speaking in class. Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that this type of anxiety is common in language learning, because students are forced to express themselves in a language they have not yet fully mastered, which makes them feel vulnerable and embarrassed in front of others. They identified three aspects of this experience: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Many participants felt fear of negative evaluation, though it appeared in various forms. Feared being judged when ran out of words, worried about what friends would think of because stood out, felt more at ease after the instructor said it was okay to make mistakes, and whose classmates and instructor were always supportive and non-judgmental,

reported feeling almost no anxiety at all. The contrast among these participants is one of the most important findings of this study, it demonstrates that the fear of negative evaluation is not a fixed personal trait, but rather something strongly influenced by the classroom atmosphere. When students feel truly safe, they can speak more freely and take more chances. Okyar (2023), Alhourani et al. (2025), and Burhanuddin et al. (2023) all reached similar conclusions, identifying the fear of negative evaluation as one of the strongest factors that prevent EFL students from speaking in class.

2. Students' Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Academic Speaking Courses

Despite facing various challenges, the students did not simply stop communicating. They actively employed various strategies to keep the conversation going, according to the taxonomy of Dörnyei & Lee Scott (1997), which divided strategies into three categories: message adjustment strategies, message achievement strategies, and time-gaining strategies. This confirms that the students were not passive learners, they were creative and adaptive communicators capable of discovering ways to overcome their limitations.

All four participants used message adjustment strategies when they could not find the exact words they needed. The most common approach was to use simpler words or explain their meaning indirectly. These adjustments helped them keep talking without stopping the

conversation. Sitorus et al. (2022) and Chou (2024) found the same pattern, suggesting that such strategies directly help EFL learners maintain conversational fluency even with limited vocabulary.

Another participant's approach is slightly more complex, instead of simply replacing a word, they explain their meaning in a longer way when the exact term is unavailable. Nurwanto et al. (2023) found that this kind of paraphrasing approach actually helps students improve their speaking skills over time, as it encourages more creative and flexible language use. This highlights an important point: message adjustment strategies do not merely help in the moment, they can also support long-term language growth by encouraging students to engage more deeply with the limitations of their vocabulary,

When message adjustment was not enough, the participants also asked others for help. Asking for help was the most common strategy among the four participants. Students directly asked their conversation partner about a word, then repeated it in context. Another student took a step-by-step approach: they first asked a nearby friend, then used Google Translate, and only asked the instructor for help when there was no other option. This layered approach reflects a social awareness that goes beyond mere problem-solving. The students were clearly aware of the social consequences of directly asking the teacher for help in the middle of class, which shaped how and from whom they asked for help.

Participant uses code-switching as a way to keep conversations going. This works as a short-term solution, but it also carries risks. Aziz & Kashinathan, (2021) found that overreliance on the first language can slow down speech development in the long term. This means code-switching should be treated as a temporary bridge, not a permanent solution, and teachers may need to manage its use wisely in the classroom.

Participants also used filler words and pauses to give themselves more time to think without having to stop the conversation entirely. Syamsudin et al. (2024) found that the use of filler words helps EFL students feel more confident during speaking practice, and Nugroho (2019) showed that time-gaining strategies are the most frequently used strategies by EFL students at all proficiency levels, suggesting that the use of filler words is a normal and natural part of oral competence development, not a sign of weakness. However, the participant also mentioned that their lecturer did not recommend the use of filler words. Rather than prohibiting them entirely, it might be more beneficial to teach students when and how to use filler words appropriately, as part of an effort to build confidence in speaking and broader strategic competencies.