

Students' Experiences in Using Zoom-Based Learning to Enhance English Speaking Skills in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigates English Education students' experiences in using Zoom-based learning to enhance English speaking skills in an EFL classroom context. A qualitative descriptive design was employed with nine undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom in mixed Indonesian-English to support comfortable expression. All interviews were recorded using Zoom's built-in recording feature, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns. The findings indicate that Zoom facilitates speaking practice by increasing opportunities for structured interaction, particularly through breakout rooms and guided discussions, and by enabling flexible participation via audio, video, and chat. Students also valued screen sharing for organizing ideas and sustaining talk during tasks. Nevertheless, participants reported constraints that hindered performance, including unstable internet connection, audio delay, reduced spontaneity due to limited non-verbal cues, and anxiety when speaking on camera or being recorded. Overall, Zoom-based learning can contribute to speaking development when instructors design interactive, turn-rich tasks, manage turn-taking clearly, and provide supportive, focused feedback. Creating a psychologically safe climate and preparing technical contingencies are recommended to reduce anxiety and maintain engagement in online speaking classes in this participant cohort.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely regarded as a central skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it reflects learners' ability to communicate meaning in real time and interact appropriately with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In higher education, speaking competence supports students' academic performance through classroom discussions, presentations, and collaborative tasks, and it also relates to future professional communication demands (Sandelowski, 2000). Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for many EFL learners. Students commonly experience fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary and fluency, difficulties in pronunciation, and anxiety when speaking in front of peers (Horwitz et al., 1986). Classroom

dynamics may further constrain speaking development when opportunities to speak are unequal, interaction is limited, and feedback is insufficient or delayed (Canagarajah, 2011). These conditions highlight the need for learning environments that provide frequent, supportive, and meaningful oral practice.

The expansion of online learning has transformed how speaking instruction is delivered. During and after the COVID-19 period, many institutions adopted synchronous video-conferencing platforms to sustain real-time teaching and interaction (Al-Jarf, 2021). Zoom is among the most widely used platforms for online learning because it offers audio and video meetings, chat, screen sharing, breakout rooms, and recording features that can support instructional delivery and communication (Mu'awanah et al., 2021). In EFL classrooms, such features may enable various speaking activities, including guided discussions, role-play, problem-solving tasks, and presentations (Nisa et al., 2021). Compared with asynchronous learning, synchronous platforms potentially offer stronger conditions for turn-taking, immediate responses, and social engagement—elements closely associated with speaking development (Lee, 2021). However, online speaking interaction differs from face-to-face communication due to reduced non-verbal cues, possible delays, and altered conversational flow, which may influence learners' participation and perceived improvement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Zoom-based learning may facilitate speaking practice in several ways. First, Zoom can increase access to interaction by enabling learners to join speaking activities from different locations and by providing multiple modes of participation. Students may speak through audio or video, use chat to support ideas, and prepare notes while participating, which can be especially helpful for learners who need additional time to organize their responses (Mustafa et al., 2022). Second, Zoom provides tools that can scaffold speaking tasks. Breakout rooms allow small-group interaction that may increase speaking turns and reduce the pressure of speaking in front of the whole class (Swain, 1995). Screen sharing can provide prompts, visuals, or task instructions that support students' organization of ideas and sustain talk during interaction (Garrison et al., 2000). Recording features may support reflective learning when students review their speaking performance to notice pronunciation, fluency, and delivery issues (Nazili & Aiyrum, 2023). When combined with clear task design and supportive feedback, these affordances may contribute to improved engagement and confidence in speaking practice (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Nevertheless, students may also experience challenges in Zoom-mediated speaking classes. Technical constraints are frequently reported in synchronous online learning, including unstable internet connections, audio delay, and device limitations (Guzacheva, 2020). Such disruptions can interrupt speech, reduce clarity, and discourage learners from taking speaking turns, particularly when they fear being misunderstood or “cut off” during interaction (Chien, 2022). Beyond technical issues, interaction through Zoom may feel less spontaneous because delays can affect turn-taking and because non-verbal cues (e.g., eye contact, gestures, and immediate facial feedback) are limited or not always visible (Hampel & Stickler, 2015). These interactional constraints can reduce conversational naturalness and influence learners' willingness to participate in extended talk (Chapelle, 2001).

Affective factors are also critical in speaking development. Speaking anxiety is a well-established barrier in EFL contexts, often linked to fear of negative evaluation, self-consciousness, and concern about making errors in public (Horwitz et al., 1986). In online settings, anxiety may be amplified when cameras are on or when sessions are recorded, because learners may feel more

observed and worry that mistakes are “permanent” or replayable (Liu & Jackson, 2005). Conversely, some learners may feel more comfortable in online environments because they can control their participation mode (e.g., audio-only) and rely on chat as support, suggesting that the affective impact of Zoom may vary across individuals (Kruk, 2022). These dynamics imply that the effectiveness of Zoom-based speaking learning is shaped not only by the platform’s features but also by instructional design, peer responsiveness, and the psychological climate created by the instructor (Derakhshan et al., 2022).

Although studies have discussed online learning and video-conferencing tools broadly, there remains a need for context-specific evidence on how EFL students experience Zoom-based speaking learning and which factors they perceive as supportive or constraining (Mu’awanah et al., 2021; Nisa et al., 2021). Students’ perspectives are crucial because they reveal what aspects of online speaking tasks increase participation, what barriers reduce interaction quality, and what practical strategies students consider effective. This is particularly relevant in teacher education programs, where students are expected to develop strong communicative competence and may later apply online teaching practices in their own classrooms (Nguyen & Tran, 2021). Understanding students’ experiences can therefore provide insights for designing Zoom-mediated speaking activities that are interactive, inclusive, and supportive.

Accordingly, this study explores English Education students’ experiences in using Zoom-based learning to enhance English speaking skills in an EFL classroom context at the University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Using a qualitative approach, the study focuses on perceived benefits, perceived challenges, and students’ recommendations for improving Zoom-based speaking instruction. The guiding research questions address how students experience Zoom-mediated speaking activities, what supports their speaking practice, and what constraints hinder their participation. The findings are expected to contribute practical implications for instructors in planning interactive tasks, managing turn-taking, providing supportive feedback, and establishing learning norms that reduce anxiety and sustain engagement in online speaking classes.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore students’ experiences of Zoom-based learning in supporting English speaking skills in an EFL classroom context. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand how participants perceived and interpreted their learning experiences, rather than to test hypotheses or measure variables statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative descriptive research is suitable for providing a clear, data-grounded account of participants’ views and for identifying patterns that represent shared experiences across individuals (Sandelowski, 2000).

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang, Indonesia. The participants were nine (9) undergraduate students enrolled in the program who had experienced Zoom-mediated learning activities involving speaking practice. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative studies to select individuals with direct experience relevant to the

research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inclusion criteria were: (1) students had participated in Zoom-based classes, (2) students had engaged in speaking activities through Zoom (e.g., guided discussions, breakout-room tasks, short presentations, or role-play), and (3) students were willing to share their experiences. To maintain confidentiality, participants were anonymized using codes S1–S9 in transcripts and reporting (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. Zoom was chosen because it matched the learning platform under investigation and enabled real-time interaction while providing a reliable recording function. The interviews were conducted in mixed Indonesian–English to support participants’ comfort and allow them to express nuanced reflections; code-switching was permitted throughout the interviews (Hampel & Stickler, 2015). Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes.

An interview guide was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for probing. The questions explored: (1) students’ overall experiences in Zoom-based speaking activities, (2) perceived benefits of Zoom for speaking development (e.g., opportunities to speak, use of breakout rooms), (3) challenges (technical, interactional, and affective), and (4) suggestions for improving Zoom-mediated speaking instruction. Probing questions were used to elicit examples and clarify participants’ meanings, which supports depth and credibility in qualitative interviewing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). With participants’ consent, all interviews were recorded using Zoom’s built-in recording feature.

Transcription and Language Handling

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants’ intended meanings and to ensure analytic rigor (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Because interviews involved mixed Indonesian–English responses, both languages were retained in the transcripts to minimize meaning loss and to reflect authentic expression (Hampel & Stickler, 2015). For reporting purposes, Indonesian excerpts may be translated into English where needed; translations prioritized equivalence of meaning rather than literal word-for-word conversion and were checked collaboratively by the research team (Chapelle, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies recurring patterns (themes) across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed established phases: (1) familiarization with the transcripts through repeated reading, (2) initial coding of meaningful segments related to speaking experiences and Zoom use, (3) clustering codes into broader candidate themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes to ensure they coherently represented the dataset, and (5) defining and naming final themes supported by representative excerpts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Coding was primarily inductive, allowing themes to emerge from participants’ accounts rather than being imposed from predetermined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout analysis, the researchers documented coding decisions and theme revisions to enhance transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

To strengthen trustworthiness, the study applied several qualitative rigor strategies. First, peer debriefing was conducted among the authors to discuss codes, compare interpretations, and refine

theme definitions, which helps reduce individual bias and improves analytic consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, member checking was conducted by sharing a brief summary of interpreted themes with participants to confirm whether the interpretations reflected their experiences accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Third, an audit trail was maintained to document key methodological and analytic decisions, including changes to codes and the rationale for final theme selection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These steps support credibility and dependability by showing that findings were developed systematically from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were applied throughout the study. Participants were informed about the study purpose, interview procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained before interviews, including consent for Zoom recording. Participant identities were protected using codes (S1–S9), and any identifying information was removed during transcription. Recordings and transcripts were stored securely and were used only for research purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis generated five interconnected themes describing students' experiences of Zoom-based learning for developing English speaking skills in EFL classrooms. Overall, students perceived Zoom as enabling more structured opportunities to practice speaking, but the effectiveness of online speaking was shaped by task design, interaction quality, technical stability, and affective factors such as speaking anxiety (Al-Jarf, 2021; Mu'awanah et al., 2021).

First, participants reported that Zoom increased speaking opportunities when lecturers used structured tasks (e.g., guided discussions, short presentations, and role-play). Students described that breakout rooms were particularly supportive because small-group settings created more speaking turns and reduced the pressure of speaking in front of the whole class. This aligns with studies suggesting that small-group interaction in online settings can increase participation and provide a more comfortable environment for oral practice (Nisa et al., 2021; Lee, 2021). From an interaction-oriented perspective, speaking development is supported when learners have frequent opportunities to negotiate meaning and respond to peers during communicative tasks (Chien, 2022).

Second, students emphasized that Zoom's multimodal features scaffolded participation. Several participants valued the chat function as a low-stakes channel to contribute ideas and clarify understanding before speaking orally, while screen sharing helped them organize content and sustain talk during tasks. These experiences are consistent with research indicating that multimodal supports can facilitate learner engagement and help reduce barriers to oral participation in online learning (Mu'awanah et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2022). Opportunities to produce spoken output—supported by prompts and peer interaction—may also help learners notice gaps and refine language use over time (Swain, 1995).

Third, participants highlighted that the quality of interaction depended heavily on peer responsiveness and classroom management. When classmates were active and turn-taking was clear, students perceived discussions as smoother and more meaningful. Conversely, passive peers and unclear participation rules reduced interaction and limited speaking practice. This supports the view that teaching presence and facilitation strategies are critical for sustaining social presence and

productive discourse in online learning environments (Garrison et al., 2000). In Zoom-mediated speaking classes, clear roles, time limits, and structured prompts may help maintain interactional flow and increase equitable participation (Mu'awanah et al., 2021).

Fourth, technical constraints were reported as a prominent barrier. Students described unstable internet connections and audio delays that interrupted fluency, reduced comprehension, and sometimes discouraged them from speaking. Prior studies similarly identify connectivity and audio issues as major challenges in synchronous online language learning, affecting both performance and motivation (Al-Jarf, 2021; Nazili & Aiyrum, 2023). This suggests the importance of technical preparedness and contingency strategies, such as shorter speaking turns, backup asynchronous voice submissions, or flexible participation modes (Mu'awanah et al., 2021).

Finally, students described speaking anxiety as influenced by camera use and recording. Some participants felt more self-conscious when speaking on camera or when sessions were recorded, reflecting concerns about negative evaluation. This aligns with research on foreign language speaking anxiety, which can reduce willingness to communicate and limit oral participation (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1998). However, students also indicated that small-group breakout rooms sometimes reduced anxiety by creating a less threatening audience. Therefore, establishing an error-tolerant climate, allowing gradual progression from small-group to whole-class speaking, and providing supportive feedback may help reduce anxiety and encourage participation in Zoom-based speaking instruction (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Kruk, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored English Education students' experiences of Zoom-based learning in supporting English speaking skills in an EFL classroom context. The findings indicate that Zoom can function as an effective medium for speaking practice when instructional design intentionally creates interactive, turn-rich opportunities for students to use English. Students perceived that structured tasks—particularly guided discussions and breakout-room activities—helped increase speaking turns, reduce whole-class pressure, and promote more active participation. These results support earlier research suggesting that small-group online interaction can facilitate engagement and provide supportive conditions for oral practice (Nisa et al., 2021; Lee, 2021). In addition, multimodal features such as chat and screen sharing were perceived as useful scaffolds that helped students organize ideas, clarify meaning, and participate more confidently, which aligns with studies emphasizing the role of multimodal support in online language learning environments (Mu'awanah et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2022).

However, the study also highlights constraints that may limit the effectiveness of Zoom-mediated speaking instruction. Technical issues, including unstable internet connection and audio delay, disrupted communication flow and reduced students' willingness to speak. This echoes prior findings that technical reliability is a critical prerequisite for successful synchronous language learning (Al-Jarf, 2021; Nazili & Aiyrum, 2023). Furthermore, affective factors—especially speaking anxiety related to being on camera or recorded—emerged as a significant barrier for some students. This finding is consistent with research on foreign language anxiety and willingness to communicate, which suggests that evaluative concerns can reduce participation and hinder oral development (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Notably, several students reported that smaller breakout-

room settings felt safer and helped them speak more freely, implying that audience size and classroom climate are important mediating conditions in online speaking contexts (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Kruk, 2022). Overall, Zoom-based learning can contribute positively to EFL speaking development if instructors implement interactive tasks, manage turn-taking clearly, provide supportive feedback, and build an error-tolerant learning climate that reduces anxiety. Practical recommendations include maximizing small-group speaking time, offering low-stakes rehearsal before plenary speaking, and preparing technical contingencies to maintain continuity of participation. Future research may triangulate interview data with classroom observations and speaking performance artifacts to provide more detailed evidence of speaking development over time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Garrison et al., 2000).

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