

# INDONESIAN PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEIVED CHALLENGES IN IMPROVING ENGLISH ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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**Abstract:** The study investigates perceived challenges that pre-service teachers (henceforth refers to PSTs) majoring in an English Education Program of a state university in the Province of Gorontalo, Indonesia, experience in improving their English oral proficiency level. Data from the PSTs were collected mainly using individual semi-structured interviews, and then corroborated with the interview results collected from several lecturers who participated voluntarily. Informed by a thematic analysis approach, the study shows that the PSTs reported three main areas of challenges; linguistic proficiency, socio-culture, and English language engagement opportunity. Recommendations seeking to assist PSTs as well as the English Education Program in anticipating such challenges are also addressed.

**Keywords:** *challenges, English oral communication, pre-service teachers*

## INTRODUCTION

The study reported in this article aims at examining challenges faced by students majoring in an English Education Program in the north part of Indonesia (henceforth refers to pre-service students/PSTs) in improving their English oral communication skills. This program plays a key role in the English language teaching (ELT) arena in Indonesia. It caters to the need of English teachers, particularly in Gorontalo and the surrounding provinces, by educating competent and professional teacher candidates to teach

English at the school level. Ideally, upon the completion of their undergraduate study, the candidates should demonstrate adequate understanding of English language use and teaching because becoming proficient and skillful for these purposes indicates success in language learning, as stipulated in the programs curriculum. However, research has shown that there remains a large number of university graduates majoring in English Education Programs, in particular, who are not confident users of the language they have learnt, especially in the context of oral communication (Gan, 2012; Wang & Roopchund, 2015; Zein, 2014).

Because expectation over competent English teacher candidates across schools in Indonesia, in general, is increasingly high, it is important to examine what compromise effective English oral communication skills development by PSTs majoring in an English Education Program to address such expectation. This will further ensure that “essential consideration, development, and treatment” on low English oral proficiency level of English teachers and their students within educational system of a country be maintained (Lo, 2018, p. 601).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Oral Communication**

Oral communication refers to a skill that comprises speaking and listening. Oliver and Philp (2014, p. 5) describe oral communication as “the type of speaking and listening that occurs in real time (i.e. in the present) in communicative exchanges (i.e. interactions)”. Such exchanges entail the process of meaning making of both communicators (Adler & Rodman, 2009). In language learning, oral communication skill is one of the most crucial aspects because it demands that learners pay full attention to output and the quality of comprehensible input (González, Humanez & Arias, 2009). As a skill, oral communication often receives more attentions from learners because improving oral communication skills indicates a part of successful language learning. Learners who find using the

language they learn for wide communication purposes manageable and are confident at doing it, for example, can have the opportunity to develop their oral proficiency level. However, difficulties on becoming confident users of English continuously challenge many learners, particularly, in the foreign language education contexts.

Undoubtedly, becoming confident speakers in oral communication, such as in English, is achievable. However, there are various factors that interfere in learners' effort to communicate using English comfortably. According to Ur (1996), factors such as interference of L1 use, rare fruitful exposures to English uses, and shyness are barriers to practice speaking another language. Other factors related to anxiety (Hashemi, 2011; Horwitz, 2001) also contribute largely to learners' poor performance in using another language orally. Studies have shown that, when expressing themselves in the language they learn, many English language learners often experience latent construct of difficulties despite prolonged formal language training they have.

In Palestine, for instance, Alyan (2013) found that the main English oral communication problems that the students majoring in English had were found in the areas of pronunciation, vocabulary, exposure to English uses, self-confidence, and L1 influence. Similar findings were also present in the study conducted by Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014) in Iraq, who pointed out that limited English exposures and low self-confidence were significant factors to English oral communication performance by university students majoring in English. Likewise, in Indonesia, some examples of speaking problems of the students majoring in an English Education Program were rooted in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and anxiety aspects (Abrar, Mukminin, Habibi, Asyraf, Makmur, & Marzulina, 2018).

Such inadequacy in English language teacher preparation can impact on the graduates teaching performance in the future. They can feel insecure in teaching a language that they themselves have been struggling with; or, they enjoy doing it because they demonstrate a sound understanding of English language pedagogy and an adequate

level of English proficiency. Abrar (2017) points out that proficiency in, for example, using English orally can be achieved provided that adequate amount of meaningful exposures to English use as well as language tuition are accessible in the formal and informal educational settings. In the following section, the context of the present study is outlined.

### **Context to the study**

The English Department, where the present study was conducted, is an English Education Program at the undergraduate level of a state university, located in the Province of Gorontalo in Indonesia. The department is responsible for providing secondary schools in the province with competent English teachers. 'Competent' means the graduate students meet certain criteria with respect to language and pedagogical skills before they teach English as an additional language to Indonesian school students. To help them become competent, it is necessary to ensure sustainable improved ELT practices in the institution, which in turn helps maintain highly qualified graduate students who will bring continued improvement in English language teaching at secondary schools in Indonesia.

The improvement of ELT in the English Department has taken place in many ways. The curriculum has been revised, the lecturers have been continuously encouraged to develop their professionalism, and the teaching resources have been improved. However, challenges persist, especially in the area of developing PSTs' English oral communication skills, leaving lecturers with more tasks to accomplish. I have noticed some examples of the challenges while working in the department as one of the lecturers, such as PSTs having difficulties in getting adequate stimuli for L2 oral interactions in and out of classrooms because of L1 use outweighing L2 in some ways; or lecturers having difficulties in creating opportunities for PSTs to engage in effective L2 oral interaction due to limited teaching hours and large class size. Even though examining the PSTs' perspectives may not help address all the different challenges in oral

communication domains, such examination can provide meaningful insights for PSTs, lecturers, and the department into how they can deal with the currently occurring challenges. The present study, which is part of a larger study conducted in the same institution, therefore, asks the following research question, "What are the challenges that PSTs experience when using English for oral communication purposes?".

## **METHOD**

Seven PSTs participated voluntarily in the study. Because the focus of this study was to learn from individual's experience and to examine how they made meaning to their experiences, the study did not account for large number of participants to collect data, as it is usually done in collecting quantitative data. Data from the PSTs were then corroborated with data obtained from all lecturers who were teaching Speaking and Listening classes for corroboration purposes.

To collect data, a semi structured interview method with both groups of participants was used. All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The interviews were done in the English and Indonesian languages, and lasted between 25-45 minutes. Prior to conducting the interviews with the participants, pilot interviews were done.

Before collecting data, the head of the department was contacted by email and requested to grant permission to collect data from the PSTs and lecturers. When permission was granted, the PSTs were then approached. Two criteria for selecting the PSTs were applied: teaching experience and academic reports. A semi-structured interview with one of the targeted PSTs led the researcher to another PST for a subsequent individual interview, which was audio recorded. Eventually seven PSTs were interviewed.

Data from the lecturers, on the other hand, were gathered by inviting several lecturers to participate. The lecturers were selected by using a purposive sampling method. Setting boundaries (focusing on particular lecturers teaching coursework units, i.e. Speaking and

Listening) assisted in the collection of data that connected to the objectives of the research and provided examples to examine in depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To analyse the data, a thematic analysis approach was used. Participants' responses arising from the interviews were grouped and assigned with various codes. These codes were further analysed and grouped to elicit themes that addressed the research question.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Findings to address the key research question are presented under the following themes: (1) Linguistic proficiency challenges; (2) Socio-culture challenges; (3) English language engagement opportunity challenges. Following the presentation of each finding is the discussion. In the findings section, quotes from both the PSTs and the lecturers are included as evidence to support each finding. At the end of each quote, there is a sign in brackets, which details who owns the quote and the page of the interview transcript from which the quote is taken. English translations are given following each quote written in Indonesian (in italics).

### **Linguistic Proficiency Challenges**

Linguistic proficiency challenges refer to some aspects of language skills, such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary that the PSTs found difficult to improve. PST4, for instance, described how he was still unable to improve his grammar, which in turn affected his accuracy in English:

*Mungkin skill saya dalam...yang paling yang paling susah atau sangat sulit bagi saya itu dalam memparalelkan kata-kata dalam berbahasa Inggris. Di grammar (XXX) masih goyang. Grammar saya belum stabil. (PST4: 21)*

*Maybe the skill I have in...what I found to be the most difficult in structuring words in English is grammar. (XXX) My grammar has not improved. It is not stable yet. (Researcher's translation, PST4: 21)*

PST2 added that having limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation in English language was a disadvantage for him and could result in poor English oral skills. He suggested that if he had

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enough English vocabulary, he would be able to “enrich” his sentences. He would be able to express himself in the language he was learning:

*Yes, yes, besides the...how to pronounce it and also our vocabularies because I realise that I still have the limitation of vocabularies and I also realise that if I don't have enough vocabularies, I couldn't enrich my sentence to say what I mean, like that. Yes. (PST2: 28)*

In addition, PST7 reported that what she perceived to be a discouraging factor in speaking English was having limited English vocabulary. She assumed that people with limited L2 vocabulary, like her, would find difficulties to express themselves in the L2, and this might make them fearful about speaking up:

*Kurang penguasaan vocab. Itu yang paling bikin orang takut ngomong bahasa Inggris itu karena vocab masih limited, masih terbatas sekali. Jadi orang masih...bahasa Inggris apa, bahasa Inggris ini apa, bahasa Inggris ini apa. (PST7: 41)*

*Lack of vocabulary mastery. That is what makes people afraid to speak English because of limited vocabulary. So, people still...what is this in English, what is that in English. (Researcher's translation, PST7: 41)*

These PSTs' views were confirmed by lecturers (Lecs). Lecturer 1 (Lec1), for instance, believed that English grammar (and intonation) were challenging for the PSTs, and she perceived that it was caused by a lack of practice:

*Then maybe half of them they are eager to talk but you know we can see that their problems with grammar, they have problem with intonation because lack of practices. (Lec1: 58)*

With regard to English pronunciation, Lec5 and Lec7 said that the PSTs found this challenging. According to Lec7, the reason why it was challenging was because the PSTs' local languages featured pronunciation forms which influenced the way the PSTs pronounced words in the L2:

*Kadang di dalam pengucapan dalam Bahasa Inggris dari mahasiswa itu pengaruh disitu adalah bahasa ibu mereka. Iya. Kadang kalau dia berasal dari Makassar pengaruh juga bahasa ibunya ya dari cara pengucapannya. Jadi apa yang mereka dengar walaupun berulang-ulang kadang masih juga tetap begitu. (Lec7: 14)*

*Sometimes what influences the students' pronunciation is their mother tongue. Yes. Sometimes, if they come from Makassar, Makassar language may affect their pronunciation. So, what they listen to, even though they listen to it repeatedly, their pronunciation remain the same. (Researcher's translation, Lec7: 14)*

In addition to English pronunciation, some lecturers reported that a lack of vocabulary was also an oral communication challenge for the PSTs. Lec3, for instance, said:

*Oh ya mostly because they have lack of vocabulary. That's the major problems that we have in speaking class. (Lec3: 53)*

Lec11 added that a lack of vocabulary can prevent the PSTs from misunderstanding messages in English:

*Saya berusaha untuk memberitahu mereka comprehend, pemahamannya, dan vocab-nya itu harus banyak. Otomatis kalau mereka tidak banyak vocab, kosa katanya yang dikuasai, berarti mereka tidak bisa mengerti apa yang diucapkan orang. (Lec11: 62)*

*I try to tell them to comprehend, their understanding, and to have a lot of vocabulary. Of course, if they lack vocabulary, vocabulary to master, it means that they cannot understand what other people say." (Researcher's translation, Lec11: 62)*

With regard to this first theme, Mukminatien (1999) as cited in Widiati and Cahyono (2006) also find that these linguistic proficiency challenges were experienced by the students who major in an English Education Program. Some of these typical challenges appeared in the area of grammatical accuracy, word stress and intonation, and incorrect word choice (Mukminatien, 1999, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006) as well as foreign language anxiety (Abrar et al., 2018). This finding is also consistent with that of Alyan's (2013) study in the context of Palestinian English language learners at the tertiary level. Alyan has found out that many of the participating lecturers reported that poor pronunciation and intonation were sources of difficulties that impacted on their students' speaking ability.

Why the PSTs in the English Education Program in Indonesia continued to experience such challenges can be related to how they received English instruction during their high school studies and how they used the language to practice communication. In Indonesia,

English occupies the domains of education and employment, but there remains a wide gap in terms of how language instruction operates in the classroom and how the employment sectors respond to the needs for the language (Lie, 2007; Suryanto, 2015). In the domain of education, in many rural areas in Indonesia, the practice of ELT at the secondary level is a picture of complex issues, ranging from teachers' limited competence to poor access to English users (Suryanto, 2015). In fact, it is often portrayed as a teacher using a talking-time teaching approach, or at worst, teachers spending the entire teaching hours dictating from textbooks (Lamb & Coleman, 2008), leaving the core of teaching English, viz. to encourage students to communicate using the language, underrepresented in the teachers' teaching practices.

Such a teacher-centered approach is influenced by a range of factors, some of which include the size of the class, the teachers' pedagogical competence, and the curriculum. Kurihara and Samimy's study (2007) had evidence of how these factors became influential in English classroom in Japan. These researchers reported that with 36 to 42 students in the classroom, the Japanese English language teachers felt it difficult to apply pedagogical skills they obtained during teacher training program. Likewise, at the secondary school level in Indonesia, Indonesian English teachers had difficulties in delivering the English syllabus effectively to approximately 40-50 students in the classroom (Lie, 2007). Surprisingly, this large class size remains as an issue at the English Education Program at the tertiary level. Many of the lecturers of the present study reported that their PSTs did not have enough chances to use English to communicate one another during speaking classes because of the size of the class. With this in mind, expecting the PSTs to interact using English as a lingua franca in the classroom context as a way to promote the use of English is hardly feasible.

Why it is hardly feasible is due to a number of reasons. First, many Indonesian learners of English demonstrate different levels of English proficiency (Lie, 2007; Suryanto, 2015), with the majority

being beginners. Second, students demonstrating ability in speaking English may not always impress their peers - trying to speak English with peers, if not prompted by the classroom tasks, can be seen as a showing-off act, and can be inconvenient for the other students. Third, because they share the same lingua franca (Indonesian), all the students prefer using Indonesian to English when interacting with one another and with their teacher (Suryanto, 2015). In addition, the allocated time for English tuition at secondary schools may not be sufficient to accommodate the different needs of the students in the classroom (Mustafa, 2001; Sahiruddin, 2013). All these reasons can lead to the absence of collaborative classroom tasks, where students and teachers may actively engage in. With this absence, promoting meaningful L2 interaction in the classroom can be difficult to facilitate because of the lack of language model in the classroom-based L2 interaction, which often comes from the teachers.

With regard to teachers' pedagogical competence, many language classrooms in rural areas across Indonesia lack of effective English language teachers. To point out this shortage is important because teachers are role models that the students can imitate when learning a new language (Klanrit & Sroinam, 2012). When teachers have lack ability, for example, in spoken English, it is difficult to expect them to encourage their students to speak English. This is often the case with English language teachers in rural areas in Indonesia whose expertise is other than English Education (Suryanto, 2015).

They are often assigned to teach English because the schools where they work do not have trained English language teachers. What happens in the classroom is that they often focus exclusively on English textbooks, with the main activities are completing written tasks. Canagarajah and Ashraf (2013) consider this situation to be a consequence of teaching an additional language, such as English, where local languages are dominant. A further analysis of the data presented in this section showed that the English oral communication

challenges associated with the PSTs in and out of lectures also impacted on socio-cultural aspects of their learning.

### **Socio-Culture Challenges**

Socio-culture challenges refer to challenges such as PSTs' lack of confidence and peer pressure. With regard to the lack of confidence issue, PST3 reported that difficulties in expressing ideas and feeling under confident were common for her when speaking English, as seen in the following excerpt. 'Ab' is the initial of the researcher, and the number following it is the turn-taking response:

- PST42 : Problems, it's hard for me to...  
Ab43 : Express?  
PST43 : Yes. And sometimes I am feel not, what is?  
Ab44 : Confident.  
PST45 : Yes.

PST5 also stated that the major problem she had when communicating in English was her confidence in front of her classmates. She attributed her under-confident feeling with a lack of vocabulary which triggered silence while speaking in English. She said:

*Of course improve my speaking skill and I think my biggest problem in English is my confidence. It's so hard to be relaxed standing in front of the class and say whatever you want to say but it's just it's usually stuck in some words that couldn't find the vocabulary or something like that. (PST5: 28)*

With regard to the peer pressure issue, PST1 contended that the stress that many PSTs felt was caused by the inability to pronounce some English words in front of other peers and the influence of the linguistic features of their local languages on their use of English:

*Disini khan rata-rata berbicaranya English tapi ke Indo-Indo-an, Sir. And then yang ini benar-benar bukan Indo lagi tapi kedaerahan bawa ama logat-logatnya daerahnya, trus pengucapannya salah-salah untuk bahasanya yang seharusnya gimana dibuat gimana. So it's not familiar for other student. So they make me, make them laugh." (PST1: 53)*

*Here, many people speak Indonesian English, Sir. And then it is not only the Indonesian language that matters, but also their vernacular languages and accents. Also, their pronunciation is often wrong. So it's not familiar for other*

*students. So they make me, make them laugh.” (Researcher’s translation, PST1: 53)*

PST3 added that she often felt embarrassed when her peers laughed at her mispronunciation. Apparently, a talk like the one she gave in the classroom was a source of concern. Below is an interview quote with this PST. The sentence in brackets is the researcher’s translation.

- Ab54 : What makes you embarrassed?  
PST54 : Ketika salah mengucapkan, salah kata, salah penempatan kata when I spoke in front of class. [When mispronouncing, wrong words, misplacing words when I spoke in front of class]  
Ab55 : But the audience may not do something.  
PST55 : They laugh.

These PSTs responses were confirmed by the lecturers. With regard to confidence, for instance, Lec4 said that her PSTs became nervous, particularly when speaking in L2, because they were not confident. This feeling, she argued, put the PSTs in the group of what she called “weak students”, which called for attention by the lecturers. This lecturer implied that confidence play a key role in learning an L2, especially in L2 oral communication:

*Some are so nervous because lack of confidence. So we have to work hard in terms of paying attention also to the weak students... . (Lec4: 5)*

Lec9 asserted that a lack of confidence was also the main challenge that the PSTs experienced in the classroom. She contended that the reason for this was PSTs’ personalities. Some PSTs felt shy about expressing ideas, whereas others did not understand what to say:

*Tantangan utama pada dasarnya mereka malu ya. Ada yang kembali ke karakteristik mahasiswa itu sebenarnya. Ada yang memang dia tau tapi dia malu mengungkapkan. Lalu, ada yang memang benar-benar tidak paham. (Lec9: 61)*

*The main challenge is they are shy. Actually it depends on the students’ characteristics. There are some students who know something, but they feel shy to say it. Then, there are some students who do not understand. (Researcher’s translation, Lec9: 61)*

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This view was supported by Lec11, who said that the PSTs were shy about using English to communicate, because they feared making mistakes:

*Mereka malu untuk mempraktekannya, mempraktekkan, malu untuk berbahasa Inggris, malu untuk dan takut berbuat salah. (Lec11: 67)*

*They feel shy to practice it, to practice speaking English. They feel shy and are afraid of making mistakes. (Researcher's translation, Lec11: 67)*

Responses from Lec9 and 11 indicated that PSTs might be reluctant to speak in L2 not only because they feared making mistakes, but also because support from peers were limited. When such support exists, opportunities to engage in English oral interaction, where each PST takes turn in exchanging messages and, thus, practises speaking in L2, may be present. To this end, some PSTs might have felt that they were being linguistically judged in speaking English because other PSTs chose not to use English for various reasons. That is why, because such opportunities are rare, some PSTs possibly felt demotivated to remain active in speaking English, although the opportunities to interact orally with the lecturers were available.

With regard to peer pressure, Lec3 implied that peer pressure is a typical phenomenon in language classrooms in Indonesia. Thus, asking PSTs, especially those in their first year of study on the English Education program, to switch into English when communicating in the classroom would in fact discourage them from using the language. Peer pressure, such as the fear of being linguistically judged by others while speaking in L2 was confronting for the PSTs and cause them to stay away from speaking English. Lec3 asserted:

*So, we cannot impose them to speak English all the time. They won't speak. They won't. Trust me. There is a there is a peer pressure in Indonesia in general. A peer pressure that make them don't wanna speak. (Lec3: 56)*

Lec8 added that fear of looking linguistically incompetent in front of peers caused PSTs to be reluctant to speak. Lec8 stated that making mistakes while speaking English could trigger stress in to PSTs:

*But sometimes we are found difficulties because they are reluctant or maybe they are afraid or maybe they anxiety to use English because they worried if they are wrong maybe some of their friends will laugh at their pronunciation.  
(Lec8: 44)*

This second finding concurs with Alyan's (2013) findings, in which Alyan found that shyness and fear of taking risks when speaking in English caused Palestinian English learners felt inhibited to speak English. To avoid making mistakes in speaking is a typical excuse for many language learners who are reluctant to practice using the language they are learning. One plausible reason for this reluctance is because they lack experience in using English orally (Suryanto, 2015; Suryati, 2015). These students may not be familiar with expressing ideas in English before their peers during high school, or at worst, giving a presentation in English are a totally new experience for them. As mentioned earlier, there are various factors that contribute to these unfamiliarity or presentation experiences, one of which stems from the teachers. All these situations can lead to language anxiety, a term described by Jones (2004) to refer to a state of feeling that causes language learners to refrain themselves from engaging in the classroom tasks in order that they can avoid negative evaluation from their peers due to their level of proficiency.

English language classrooms in Indonesia, like in many other non-English speaking countries, take a pivotal role in providing students with an opportunity to engage themselves in English-based classroom activities, which help promote oral communication skills. However, in reality, many English language classrooms in Indonesia fail to play the role effectively for some reasons (Maulana, Opendakker, Stroet, & Bosker, 2012; Suryati, 2015). For Yulia (2013), one of the reasons is that there is not enough stimulus created in the classroom which help students use English for communication purposes in the classroom context, and this lack of stimulus remains a challenge for the students majoring the English Education program. Yulia (2013) maintains that a lot of the teachers she investigated claimed that they preferred to speak in *Bahasa Indonesia* to help their students understand the lessons, even though they believed that it is

useful for their students' English improvement if they speak in English.

Another reason for such a problematic situation in the English language classrooms in Indonesia is related to the curriculum (Lie, 2007). In the Indonesian educational curriculum, English is one of the subjects that is tested in school examination, making it a high stake test (Sulistiyio, 2009). This means, failure to do English test may negatively affect the students' assessment for graduation. Given this 'exclusive status', many English language teachers across secondary schools in Indonesia use textbook-oriented teaching approach, aiming solely to drill students' skills to take the examination (Lamb & Coleman, 2008). As a result, the majority of high school graduates learn English for the sake of passing the exam as well. Sakamoto (2012) sees this as a 'wash-back effect' of the examination, in which students become competent in literacy skills, but not in oral and aural skills.

As candidates for becoming English language teachers, PSTs majoring in the English Education Program are expected to take any opportunity that enables them to develop their English proficiency level, especially in speaking, which many of them found to be challenging. However, as lecturers in this present study described, lacking ability in oral skills causes many of their PSTs to refrain from engaging in classroom activities where they are expected to actively use English. The PSTs need to develop not only their pedagogic skills, but also their language skills (Zein, 2014), especially in the domain of oral English. This balance in improved language and pedagogic skills is explicitly reinforced in Chapter 3 Section 9 of The Decree of Government of Republic of Indonesia No. 19/2005 on the National Standards of Education, one of which regulates the standards for graduates' competence in three areas, viz. attitude, knowledge and skills (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2005).

Alongside the PSTs experiencing issues related to socio-culture challenges, the PSTs also reported to experience some challenges in

English oral communication because of their lack of English language engagement opportunity. This is outlined in the following section.

### **English Language Engagement Opportunity Challenges**

English language engagement can be defined as PSTs involvement in any kind of activities that expose them to the use of English. With regard to a lack of English language engagement, PST5, for example, said:

*... kalau inginnya saya sih full English itu penting pembelajaran dalam full English, not mixed or in Bahasa karena kita khan kita ini sudah berada dalam program pendidikan bahasa Inggris. Kita bukan lagi jurusan lain yang mesti ditranslate artinya begini untuk ngerti apa tujuannya belajar bahasa Inggris. (PST5: 33)*

*... For me, I think it is important to carry out a lesson in English, not mixed or in Indonesian language because we are doing an English Education program. We are not like students from other departments who need translation, who want to know why they should learn English. (Researcher's translation, PST5: 33)*

PST2 added that in the classroom, the use of English was determined by the lecturers. He implied that when a lecturer chose to speak English as the main language of instruction, his peers and he would also use English, and vice versa with the use of Indonesian. Yet, this PST also argued that code switching in English and Indonesian should be tolerated:

*For my experience, it based on our lecture ya. Kadang dalam [Sometimes in] during our class, we have to speak full English ya but sometimes we also don't have to speak full English, maybe we can say in Bahasa or in English, it's okay. (PST2: 43)*

PST2 also related this lack of exposure to English in the classroom to the context outside the classroom. He stated that his opportunities to practise speaking English with his classmates were limited, particularly as he would not be spending much time on the campus in the following semesters. What he did to compensate for this situation was to teach English in an English language course in his workplace where he had the opportunity to develop his own speaking skills. The quote below demonstrates PST2's views:

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PST53 : ... Dan kalau yang untuk sekarang itu saya merasa kalau untuk kesempatan dengan teman-teman untuk berbicara bahasa Inggris itu udah ngga terlalu seperti yang seperti lalu-lalulah

*And for now I feel that the chance to speak English with my friends is not like what it was used to be in the past. (Researcher's translation)*

Ab54 : Kenapa?

*Why? (Researcher's translation)*

PST54 : Ya karena waktu saya dikampus itu udah terlalu ngga terlalu banyaklah. Jadi untuk melatih kecakapan saya itu sebagian besar saya gunakan ditempat ngajar saya saat ini, seperti itu.

*Ya because I don't have much time to spend at campus now. So, to drill my skill, I practice it when I teach at my workplace. (Researcher's translation)*

PST4, on the other hand, had a slightly different view to PST2. He said that he had enough chances to utilize his speaking skills, but not his listening skills. This PST showed that he was concerned about how to deal with difficult situations in which English fluency and accuracy were needed. He implied that he might need some strategies that he could use to maintain involvement when communicating orally in L2:

*Kalau speaking iya, mungkin listening belum. Belum saya dapat artinya belum klop dibenak saya tentang bagaimana sih cara ber-listening dengan baik, cara bagaimana mengantisipasi ketika speaker yang berhadapan dengan kita itu cepat atau narrative speakernya terlalu, apa namanya, pronouncenya sangat beda dengan apa yang kita pernah kita ketahui. (PST4: 29)*

*If it is speaking, yes, but not with listening. I have not figured out yet the way to listen effectively, the way to anticipate when the speaker speaks fast or the native speakers' pronunciation varies greatly from the ones we understand. (Researcher's translation, PST4: 29)*

Challenges with the use of L1 (Indonesian language) were confirmed by the lecturers. Responses from lecturers showed that their PSTs had limited exposure to English language users both in and outside the classroom because of the dominant use of L1. Lec4, for example, related the lack of English exposure to limited opportunities to practise the language, even in the university department:

*Of course you realise in our environment there are no much people talk in English, but if you don't start by yourself, who will you be waiting for? ... So yeah one is about the exposure of English is little .... (Lec4: 10)*

In line with Lec4, Lec5 asserted that the classroom situation at the university department did not support the PSTs using English in oral communication. This lecturer implied that he had difficulties in motivating his PSTs to practise speaking English in the classroom because of the large number of the PSTs in any one class and the limited teaching time. Lec5's responses indicated at least two things with regard to his teaching practices. First, his PSTs engaged mostly in one-way oral communication, where interaction from peers that promotes dialogue might be limited. Second, the lecturer believed that frequency in using L2 during classroom activities which involve speaking is determinant in success in learning to communicate in L2:

*It's only about a hundred minutes and then there are twenty or even more students in the class. So if we calculate, so dealing with a hundred minutes and thirty students or let just say twenty. It means that students only speak five minutes. So in one week they only have a chance to speak English five minutes and I think it less than enough for them to be better in English. (Lec5: 28)*

Lec8 added that instead of talking in L2 during group work, his PSTs talked in L1. He realised the importance of speaking in L2 when engaging in group work, which could be promoting dialogue with peers where they could develop their English fluency and accuracy, as well as improve their confidence:

*Ya usually they use Indonesian language ... And maybe it is important also that in the class they will always use English language. (Lec8:44)*

With regard to this third finding, one of the lecturers claimed that this was due to the limited teaching hours, whereas another lecturer related it to the PSTs' low levels of confidence in using English orally. Yet, surprisingly, one of their PSTs revealed a different fact. This PST claimed that many of the lecturers, in fact, do not use English as a dominant language of instruction in the classroom. This is also echoed in Zein's (2014) study, in which Zein found that many of the lecturers in English Departments in Indonesia were not satisfactorily competent and failed to provide students with language

models. This finding is also reflected in Fareh's study (2010). Fareh contended that many English language teachers in Arab schools were also not qualified to teach English because many of them had no English teaching preparation. Consequently, the English classrooms at these schools were run mostly in Arabic, minimising the students' opportunity to engage in English activities (Fareh, 2010).

Nevertheless, the findings mentioned above do not suggest that the lecturers deserve the blame for the lack of English engagement, nor that an exclusive use of English is better than using Indonesian. Instead, what is important to bear in mind is that language learners, particularly those who will teach the language as teachers in their future careers, need sufficient exposure to English users, such as by interacting using the language they are learning in and out of classroom context (Panggabean, 2015). This is because, as García Mayo and Ibarolla (2015) point out, effective L2 interaction helps a language learner obtain input, produce output and receive feedback in various forms with regard to the output, which facilitates effective language learning. Effective here means an improved level of proficiency, indicating by various factors, such as the ability to engage in L2 oral interaction with the uses of extensive vocabulary. Despite the fact that to be able to reach this level of proficiency takes time, but this endeavor remains doable for language learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study has found that causes for English oral communication challenges experienced by the PSTs were categorised into three different challenges: linguistic proficiency, socio-culture, and English language engagement opportunities. All these challenges were related to various issues, such as previous English language tuition and exposure to English use during high school study, self-reported lecturers' competence, teaching methodologies and resources, and PSTs' confidence in speaking English. These issues were interrelated. Proposing a one-size-fits-all strategy as a solution to deal with improving PSTs' oral proficiency level may not be

feasible for the lecturers to apply. The findings suggested that the English Education Program may need to carry out an evaluation of the teacher education program, especially in the area of teaching oral communication skills. Despite being successfully enrolled into the program, many of the PSTs who graduated from the surrounding high schools continued to face issues related to oral English communication for various reasons as they embarked on the English Education Program. The program needs to ensure that, in order for the PSTs to be successful in learning English, addressing the PSTs' "cognitive and affective domains" at the onset of their four-year study in the program should also be facilitated (Abrar, 2017, p. 221).

As an institution that prepares English teacher candidates for ELT praxis, the English Education Program might benefit from developing an awareness of psychological challenges, which can compromise successful English language learning. Other dimensions, such as lecturers' competency, teaching and learning resources, and the current English education curriculum may need to be re-examined to find gaps that might make it difficult for the program's stated goals to be achieved.

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