



## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS' ANALYSIS ABOUT DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH SPEAKING

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### Abstract

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English as the most widely used language in the world is learned by undergraduate students, both who are majoring in English and those who are not majoring in English. English speaking skill is an important skill because it is needed in order to have a conversation to communicate but mastering English speaking skills is not easy. The purpose of this research was to determine undergraduate students' perceptions of difficulties in speaking English, especially undergraduate students majoring in non-English languages. This study used a qualitative descriptive method with data analysis techniques based on the results of interviews with informants and through a questionnaire conducted to 67 undergraduate students. The results of the study indicate that there are psychological, social, lecturer, and linguistic factors that cause students to have difficulty speaking in English. If the undergraduate students have a perception of what difficulties they face to be able to master English speaking skills then they will be able to find solutions to overcome these difficulties. This will help them in improving their English speaking abilities

**Keywords:** Perception; Difficulty Speaking; English; Undergraduate Students

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## INTRODUCTION

English is spoken as a first and second language in many nations. English is the official language of the European Union, the United Nations, and many international organizations as a second language. As the world's most commonly spoken language, it's only reasonable that English be included as one of the compulsory subjects for undergraduate students in Indonesia. English is given to undergraduate students who are majoring in English as well as those who are not majoring in English.

In Indonesia, English is a foreign language that is taught practically at every level of education. One of the purposes of teaching English at almost all education levels in Indonesia is to help students improve their communication abilities in the international environment, both in speaking and writing. Communication skills include listening, reading, writing and speaking (Yusuf in Panjaitan & Sinaga, 2020). Communication especially focuses on the ability to speak or write. In simple terms, communication is described as delivering messages or exchanging information (McMahon in Nashruddin, 2019). This means that communication will occur when there is a process of sending and receiving messages, or in other words, there is a process of producing messages (by the sender) and understanding the message (by the recipient) (Nashruddin, 2019). The purpose of communication is to convey the message which is sent by the sender and it can be understood by the recipient in order to avoid any misunderstandings.

Speaking is the most extensively used method of communication. Rickheit and Strohner (in Nashruddin, 2019) explain that speaking is a conversation or utterance with

the aim and intent to be understood by the interlocutor or recipient. As explained by (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) that speaking is very important in second language learning, speaking skills are very important in second language learning. This corresponds to what was said by Nunan (in Basri, 2019) that learning speaking skills is the most important aspect in learning a second or foreign language and the capacity to hold a conversation in the target language is a key indicator of learning success.

Speaking is one of the most important skills of all the four language skills because individuals who learn a language are referred to as the speakers of that language (Ur in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). The main purpose of teaching English according to David and Pearse (in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) is to give learners the ability to use English effectively and appropriately in communicating. The ability to speak in a second or foreign language is a complex goal (Richards and Renandya in Hanafiah, 2019). This is because the ability to speak requires proper social interaction in order to communicate effectively (Richards and Renandya in Hanafiah, 2019). Even though the ability to speak in foreign languages, especially English is an important skill to acquire because it can provide better opportunities for users to find jobs in various companies or organizations (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). This statement is supported by Baker and Westrup (in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) who say that learners who can speak English very well have greater opportunities in terms of better education, finding good jobs or getting promotions. Therefore, it would be better for students to be able to master the ability to speak foreign languages, especially English so that they can help their future to be better.

Husnayaini (2016) explains that students' perception about the ability to speak the target language (foreign language or a language other than mother tongue) is one of the important factors that can affect the language acquisition process. Self-perception can be generated from self-awareness (self-awareness). Self-awareness is one of the important factors in the language acquisition process and critical thinking because these two things determine the individual achievement or student language skills (Üstünlüoğlu in Husnayaini, 2016). Based on the two statements above, it can be concluded that the students or undergraduate students' perception on language skills, especially the foreign language studied affects the language acquisition process so that it can determine their language skills achievement.

Perception is the process of combining and organizing our sensory data (sensing) to be developed in such a way which we can be aware of those around us (Shaleh in Budiasningrum, 2015). This can be interpreted that perception is the process of receiving a stimulus (object, quality, relationship between symptoms and events), until the stimulus is realized and understood (Budiasningrum, 2015). Meanwhile, Gibson, et al (in Budiasningrum, 2015) explain that perception is a cognitive process used by individuals to interpret and understand the surrounding world (objects). Gibson (in Budiasningrum, 2015) also argues that each individual gives meaning to the stimulus differently even though the object is the same. The way an individual perceives a situation is often more important than the situation itself.

Because of this, undergraduate students will certainly have their own perceptions about the courses they are taking. Likewise with English classes in which there is a speaking lesson. Husnayaini (2016) explained that the perception of self-ability can also be associated with language skills, especially English. According to Budiasningrum (2015) this perception is important to determine the learning quality. If students have a good self-perception of their abilities, it will motivate them to study. This is consistent with the Nazara's opinion (in Ghofur, 2015) which proclaimed the perception which students have about their abilities regarding the speaking ability level will motivate them to develop English speaking skills. It's just that many students find learning English speaking skills challenging.

Alhmadi (2014) explained that English speaking skills are still the only skills which is challenging to obtain efficiently compared to other English skills. In addition, there are many reasons why it is difficult for students to learn this skill. Therefore, if undergraduate students have their own perceptions about the difficulties in learning English speaking skills, they will know what things may be resolved in order to improve or even mastered English speaking skills. In English, there are four skills that must be mastered well, which are listening, reading, writing and speaking. According to Ur (in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) speaking skills are the most important skills for effective communication to occur. This is because the main purpose of language teaching is to provide the ability to communicate in English effectively and correctly (David and Pearse in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017)

Chaney (in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) explained that speaking is a process of creating and sharing meaning by using verbal and non-verbal symbols in different contexts. Meanwhile, Bygate (in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) defines speaking as the production of auditory signals to produce different verbal responses to listeners. It is intended as a systematic combination to form meaningful sentences. The language produced is formed and processed by the brain or mind, this shows that speaking is a thinking process in a person (Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019). Furthermore, Harmer (in Widyasworo, 2019) describes speaking as the ability to speak fluently not only based on language characteristics but also on the ability to process information and language.

Speaking is an important skill because it is needed in order to have a conversation for communicating. Speaking in English is not an easy task because the speaker must know many important components in it such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, proficiency, and understanding (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Therefore, English learners must have sufficient skills to be able to communicate easily and efficiently with other people.

According to Leong & Ahmadi (2017) the importance of speaking skills is indicated by the integration of other language skills. Speaking helps learners to develop their vocabulary and grammar as well as writing skills. Undergraduate students can express their emotions, ideas, tell stories, ask, discuss and demonstrate various other functions of language. Speaking is a social activity where individuals construct and share meaning according to the existing context (Chaney in Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019). Researchers, speakers, and learners say that speaking is the most challenging part of English (Brown and Yule in Huwari, 2019). Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (in Widyasworo, 2019) also argue that speaking skills can be considered as difficult skills to master because they require the ability to produce speech based on appropriate vocabulary, grammatical patterns and also sociocultural competencies.

This is also happens in Indonesia, where according to Widyasworo (2019) that mastering English speaking skills is not easy. Widyasworo (2019) in his research found that many students had difficulties when learning to speak in English. In the research, this difficulty was caused by students' ignorance of certain vocabulary, poor pronunciation, fear for making mistakes and apprehensions about speaking in English. These problems make it difficult for them to express or reveal ideas when speaking.

Zainurrahman & Sangaji (2019) explains that what is meant by speaking difficulties are factors that cause students' shortages in mastering speaking skills. Problems or difficulties in speaking or learning it may not come from individual incompetence but also from social barriers (Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019). In addition to social problems, undergraduate students can also experience difficulties in mastering English speaking skills because of linguistic problems. This is explained by Zainurrahman & Sangaji (2019) in their research that lack of knowledge about the language system can cause a person to have speaking difficulty.

Meanwhile, Zainurrahman & Sangaji (2019) said that speaking difficulties can also be caused by psychological reasons such as doubt, nervousness, low self-confidence and lack of vocabulary. Based on the opinions and research results above, it can be concluded that students' difficulties in mastering speaking skills are caused by linguistic, social and psychological factors. These factors will be the basis in this study which will look at the difficulties of undergraduate students in mastering English speaking skills according to their perceptions.

Shaleh (in Budiasningrum, 2015) explains that perception is a process that combines and organizes our sensory data (sensing) to be developed in such a way that we can be aware of our surroundings. Perception is the process of giving meaning to the environment by individuals, therefore each individual gives meaning to the stimulus differently even though the object is the same. (Gibson in Budiasningrum, 2015)

Sarwono (in Simarmata, 2014) reveals that perception is a person's ability to organize an observation where the ability is in the form of the ability to distinguish, organize and focus. Meanwhile, Siagian (in Simarmata, 2014) argues that perception is the process by which a person organizes and interprets his sensory impressions in an attempt to give a certain meaning to his environment.

Indrajaya (in Simarmata, 2014) says that perception is the process by which a person organizes his thoughts, utilizes, experiences and processes differences or everything about his environment. Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that perception is a person's ability to organize and interpret the environment according to the sensory stimulus given. Simarmata (2014) explains that perception does not form by itself and there are several factors that influence the formation of this perception. Krech (in Simarmata, 2014) define about factors that influence the perception formation, which are:

- 1) Frame of reference, which is the knowledge framework that a person obtain through education, training, reading, and others
- 2) Frame of experience (frame of experience), that is the frame of experience that a person gain which is usually related to his environment.

Based on the above opinion, it can be concluded that a person's perception occurs because it is formed by knowledge and also experience which is does not occur naturally. This is also happen with undergraduate students, they have a perception of their surrounding environment based on the knowledge and experience that they each have. In other words, students have different perceptions about their language skills, especially in speaking skills according to the knowledge and experience they have so far. According to Budiasningrum (2015) this perception is important to determine the quality of learning.

According to Husnayaini (2016) self-perception can be generated from self-awareness. Self-awareness is one of the important factors in the process of language acquisition and critical thinking because these two things greatly determine the individual language skills achievement (Üstünlüoğlu in Husnayaini, 2016). Self-perception is defined as an individual's assessment of his ability to organize and carry out the actions which is needed to achieve the desired level of ability (Bandura in Husnayaini, 2016).

Pajares (in Husnayaini, 2016) explains that self-perception can influence the choices, efforts which is made, and also the persistence that is carried out when faced with obstacles, stress, and anxiety. Each student has their own perception of what they are learning as well as when they are in the process of learning English (Budiasningrum, 2015). The purpose of this research was to determine undergraduate students' perceptions of difficulties in speaking English, especially undergraduate students majoring in non-English languages. If undergraduate students have perceptions of what difficulties they face to master English speaking skills then they will be able to find solutions to overcome these difficulties. This will help them in improving their English speaking abilities.

## METHODS

The research method type which is used in this research is descriptive qualitative research. Moleong (in Ghofur, 2015) explains that research which intends to understand phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects for example: behavior, perception, motivation, action, etc., holistically and described in the form of words and language, in a special natural context and by utilizing various natural methods. Qualitative research is a type of educational research in which researchers obtain data through the opinions of informants through in-depth questioning and then the data obtained is analyzed and described with the subjectivity of the researcher (Creswell in Qadri et al., 2018).

Descriptive qualitative research is a research that aims to collect data, where the data that has been successfully collected then presented again accompanied by analysis in order to provide a clear description (Prasetyono, Kurniasari, & Desnaranti, 2019). In this study, researchers will describe the non-English major undergraduate students' especially economic education study program about their perceptions regarding the difficulty of speaking in English. The analysis of this research will be based on questionnaire and interviews which is given to the non-English major undergraduate students. The answer from the interview and questionnaire given by the undergraduate students will help the researcher in describing their difficulties in mastering English speaking based on the undergraduate students' perceptions.

According to Arikunto (2012) if the population is less than 100 people, the total sample is taken as a whole, but if the population is greater than 100 people, 10-15% or 20-25% of the population can be taken. The total population of undergraduate students from economic education study programs in Indraprasta PGRI University who take English courses is 665 students. The research team took 10 percent of the population as a sample, therefore the number of students sampled was 66.5 and rounded up by the research team to 67 students.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### *Results*

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used, including in-depth interviews. The research team divided the questions into groups based on the relevance of the interview in order to determine the students' difficulties in mastering English speaking skills according to their perceptions.

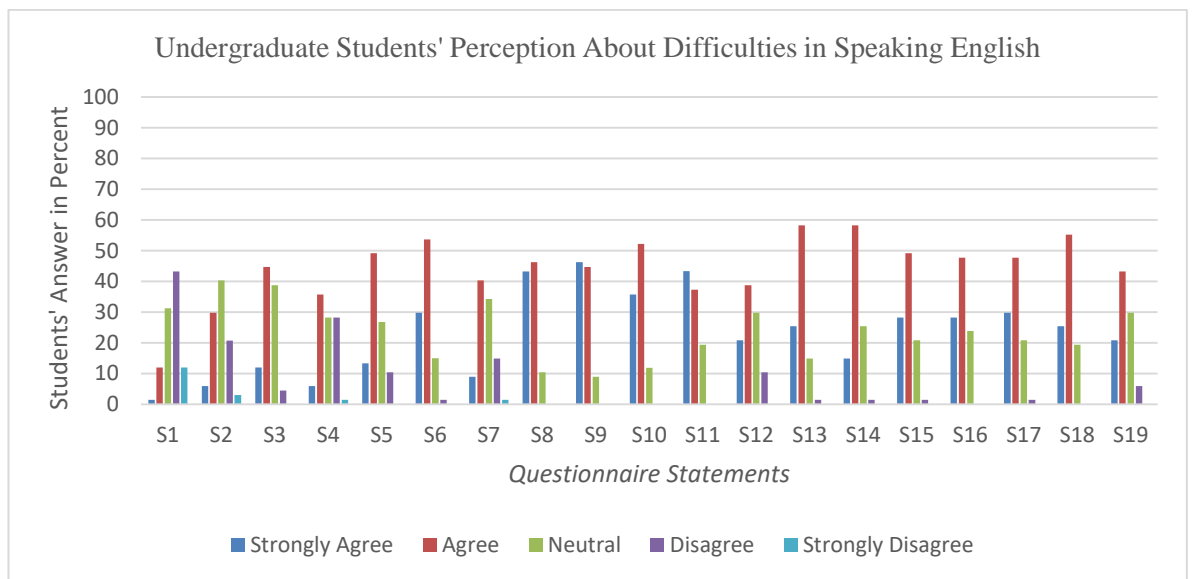
**Table 1.**  
 Interview Indicators

No	Instrument	Target	Interview Questions
1.	Interview	Non-English Major Undergraduate Students	a. English speaking difficulties caused by Psychological factors b. English speaking difficulties caused by instructor factors c. English speaking difficulties caused by social factors d. English speaking difficulties caused by linguistics factors

e. Things that should be improved regarding the speaking in English difficulties.

*Source: Processed data by research team (2021)*

In addition to interviews, the research team also provided questionnaires which were expected to provide a clear description of the students' difficulties in developing their English speaking skills based on their perceptions. The questionnaire results are displayed in chart below:



**Figure 1.**  
 Undergraduate Students' Perception about Difficulties in Speaking English  
*Source: Processed data by research team (2021)*

**Discussion**

The interviews results which have been conducted by the researchers for the speaking difficulties in English caused by Psychological factors and the respondents answered that the psychological factor which influenced them was that they had made a label for themselves that they could not speak English well. In addition, there are also respondents who answered beside the psychological factors from themselves, psychological factors from the environment around them also had an influence such as the lack of their surrounding environment providing encouragement in speaking English and also unfavorable comments if they made mistakes when speaking in English.

The respondents said for answering the interview questions regarding instructor or lecturer factors that in addition to the statements submitted by the researcher, there are several things which can be added. Such as the lack of interaction between the instructor and the undergraduate students, the instructor also give more theory than English speaking practice, the class atmosphere is also less conducive resulting the respondents feel embarrassed and uncomfortable to speak in English and also learning materials which are not supportive to respondents for practice. Regarding the social aspect, the respondents answered that in their environment there not many people are able to speak English and their knowledge level about English is poor which means the respondents do

not have someone to talk to for practicing their English speaking skills. As a result, the respondents lack the resources to practice using their English speaking skills.

The respondents' interview answered when they asked about the linguistic factors are the inadequacy of adding new vocabularies in the learning material caused the respondents feel that they are repeating the same lesson over and over again furthermore they feel frustrated because there is no development in their learning and also the respondents feel that there should be stages in learning English starting from vocabulary, meaning of words and then pronunciation. When the respondents asked about what they would improve in order they could speak English well, the answered is that they had to improve and increase their English vocabulary. Their ways of doing this vary, some say that they will use social media platforms, some will increase their vocabularies by reading books, and some will watch teaching videos via YouTube. In addition, there are also those who ask for help from professional teachers by taking English courses to help them increase their vocabularies and also help them composing sentences appropriately. Some respondents also asked for the community to help them in practicing English speaking. If they are unable to be partner for practice, at least the people in their environment can give them encouragement or motivation.

The questionnaire results for statement 1, I am not interested learning to speak in English which the research team obtained from 67 respondents, there are 1.5% or 1 student answered strongly agree that he/she is less interested learning to speak in English. As many as 12% or 8 students answered agree, 21 students (31.3%) answered neutral, 29 students (43.2%) answered disagree and 8 students or 12% answered strongly disagree. While for statement 2, I feel embarrassed when I speak in English, the results which obtained from 67 respondents are 6% or 4 students answered strongly agree that they felt ashamed when speaking in English. A total of 29.8% or 20 students answered agree, 27 students (40.35%) answered neutral, 14 students (20.8%) answered disagree and 2 students (3%) strongly disagreed.

Hence for the questionnaire results for statement 3, I feel confused when I speak in English that research team obtained from 67 respondents are 12% or 8 students answered strongly agree that they felt confused when speaking in English. A total of 44.7% or 30 students answered agree, 26 students (38.8%) answered neutral, 3 students (4.5%) answered disagree and no students answered strongly disagree. While for for statement 4, I lack motivation to speak in English, the results which obtained from 67 respondents are 6% or 4 students answered strongly agree that they lack motivation to speak in English. A total of 35.8% or 24 students answered agree, 19 students (28.3%) answered neutral, 19 students (28.3%) also answered disagree and 1 student (1.5%) strongly disagreed.

The questionnaire results for statement 5, I lack confidence when I try to speak English, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that as many as 13.4% or 9 students answered strongly agree that they lacked confidence when try to speak English. The total of 49.2% or 33 students answered agree, 18 students (26.8%) answered neutral, 7 students (10.4%) answered disagree and no students answered strongly disagree. The questionnaire results for statement 6, the lecturer listened carefully to the students' pronunciation to find out their mistakes, the results which obtained from 67 respondents are 29.8% or 20 students answered strongly agree that the lecturer listened carefully to the student's pronunciation to find out their mistakes. A total of 53.7% or 36 students answered agree, 10 students (15%) answered neutral, 1 student (1.5%) answered disagree and no student answered strongly disagree.

The results of the questionnaire for statement 7, the lecturers' English pronunciation is adjusted to the students' level which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are 9% or 6 students answered strongly agree that the lecturer's English pronunciation is in accordance with the students' level. A total of 40.3% or 27 students

answered agree, 23 students (34.3%) answered neutral, 10 students (14.9%) answered disagree and 1 student (1.5%) answered strongly disagree. The questionnaire results for statement 8, the lecturer was patient or tolerant of student pronunciation errors, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that 43.2% or 29 students answered strongly agree that the lecturer was patient or tolerant of student pronunciation errors. A total of 46.3% or 31 students answered agree, 7 students (10.4%) answered neutral, and no student answered disagree or strongly disagree.

The questionnaire results for statement 9, lecturers encourage or support the undergraduate students when they speak in English, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that 46.3% or 31 students answered strongly agree that lecturers encourage or support the undergraduate students when they speak in English. A total of 44.7% or 30 students answered agree, 6 students (9%) answered neutral, and no students answered disagree or strongly disagree. The results of the questionnaire for statement 10, lecturers use various methods in teaching speaking skills in English, which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are 35.8% or 24 students answered strongly agree that the lecturer used various methods of teaching English speaking skills. A total of 52.2% or 35 students answered agree, 8 students (11.9%) answered neutral, and no students answered disagree or strongly disagree.

The results of the questionnaire for statement 11, inadequacy of English conversation in the home environment, which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are 43.3% or 29 students answered strongly agree that there is inadequacy of English conversation in the home environment. A total of 37.3% or 25 students answered agree, 13 students (19.4%) answered neutral, and no students answered disagree or strongly disagree. The questionnaire results for statement 12, there was criticism from people around when speaking in English, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that 20.9% or 14 students answered strongly agree that there is criticism from people around when speaking with use English. A total of 38.8% or 26 students answered agree, 20 students (29.8%) answered neutral, 7 students (10.4%) answered disagree and no students answered strongly disagree.

The questionnaire results for statement 13, lack of opportunity to meet native English speakers to do some practice, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that as many as 25.4% or 17 students answered strongly agree that the lack of opportunity to meet native speakers of the language English to do the exercises. A total of 58.2% or 39 students answered agree, 10 students (14.9%) answered neutral, 1 student (1.5%) answered disagree and no student answered strongly disagree. The results of the questionnaire for statement 14, the inadequacy of holding English speaking courses by local social community which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are 14.9% or 10 students answered strongly agree that the inadequacy of holding English speaking courses by local social community. A total of 58.2% or 39 students answered agree, 17 students (25.4%) answered neutral, 1 student (1.5%) answered disagree and no student answered strongly disagree.

The results of the questionnaire for statement 15, I feel that I am lacking in English vocabulary which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are as many as 28.3% or 19 students answered strongly agree that I feel lacking in English vocabulary. A total of 49.2% or 33 students answered agree, 14 students (20.9%) answered neutral, 1 student (1.5%) answered disagree and no student answered strongly disagree. The questionnaire results for statement 16, I felt that I was lacking in composing English sentences, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that 28.3% or 19 students answered strongly agree that I felt lacking in composing English sentences. A total of 47.7% or 32 students answered agree, 16 students (23.9%) answered neutral, and no students answered disagree or strongly disagree.



The questionnaire results for statement 17, I feel I am lacking in pronouncing English words correctly, from 67 respondents the following results were obtained that 29.8% or 20 students answered strongly agree that I feel lacking in pronouncing English words correctly. A total of 47.7% or 32 students answered agree, 14 students (20.9%) answered neutral, 1 student (1.5%) answered disagree and no student answered strongly disagree. The results of the questionnaire for statement 18, I feel weak in English grammar, which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are 25.4% or 17 students answered strongly agree that I feel weak in English grammar. A total of 55.2% or 37 students answered agree, 13 students (19.4%) answered neutral, and no students answered disagree or strongly disagree. The results of the questionnaire for statement 19, I feel that I do not understand English expressions and concepts, which the research team obtained from 67 respondents are as many as 20.9% or 14 students answered strongly agree that I feel that I do not understand English expressions and concepts. A total of 43.2% or 29 students answered agree, 20 students (29.8%) answered neutral, 4 students (6%) answered disagree and no student answered strongly disagree.

Undergraduate students' perceptions about their difficulties which they experienced in mastering English speaking skills can be seen from the interview answers results and also the questionnaire that distributed by the research team. Based on this, the research team concluded according to undergraduate students' perceptions about their difficulty in mastering English speaking skills that it was related to psychological, lecturer, social and linguistic factors. For psychological factors, there are motivation, interest, lack of self-confidence and encouragement from their environment which becomes an obstacle for them in mastering English speaking skills. In terms of the lecturer or instructor factor, the lack of interaction between lecturer or instructor and students, the inadequacy implementation of speaking practices and also learning materials that are less supportive. Regarding social factors, the absence of interlocutors with whom the undergraduate students' practice English speaking and lack of English speaking knowledge in their surrounding environment also became an obstacle for the undergraduate students. For linguistic factors, the undergraduate students' lack of vocabulary is the main factor of students' difficulties in mastering English speaking skills according to their perceptions, this is mentioned in interviews and questionnaires. In addition, there are also pronunciation factor and inadequacy in understanding English expressions and concepts.

The results of this study is also in line with research conducted by Al-Roud (2016) where the problems faced by undergraduate students on improving their English speaking abilities are related to social, psychological, teaching and linguistic factors. Beside the research by Al-Roud (2016), there are other research that conducted by Zainurrahman & Sangaji (2019) which said that there are psychological, linguistic and also vocabulary factors which caused speaking difficulties of the undergraduate students. This two research have the similar outcomes with the research that have been done by the researcher team which state that psychological, social, lecturer and linguistic factors that cause undergraduate students to have difficulty speaking in English.

## **CONCLUSION**

The result of the research indicate that there are psychological, social, lecturer and linguistic factors that cause undergraduate students to have difficulty speaking in English. Based on this research it can be also concluded that lecturer or instructor, parents, the surrounding environment and undergraduate students themselves are also responsible for their difficulties in mastering English speaking skills, therefore they must work together to help in solving this problem.

Based on the research and discussion results, there are several suggestions that researchers can give to students who have difficulty in English speaking. The researchers suggested to the undergraduate students to practice speaking English more in order to increase their self-confidence even though they had to face humiliation, criticism from the environment and also lack of motivation. All of them must be able to overcome this in order to master English speaking skills thoroughly.

Lectures or instructor are also expected to be able to help increasing students' motivation by encouraging them. Lectures or instructor are also advised not to use their mother tongue too often while teaching so that it can help students to use English as much as possible in speaking. The researcher also suggests that the central and local governments can help by organizing courses or conducting additional lessons which focus on English speaking skills that can be easily accessed by undergraduate students. For further research, it is suggested to examine the effect of student's perception on other English skills such as writing or reading.

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