EFL Students’ Challenges In Learning Speaking Skills During Online-to-Offline Transition Era

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Abstract
This research aimed to explore the challenges faced by EFL students’ in learning speaking skills during the online-to-offline transition era, then the difference between the experience of learning speaking skills during online and offline, and also explain the potential solutions that EFL students’ do to overcome the challenges. The site of this research was an English study program at one public university in Jambi. The participants in this study were five fourth-semester students consisting of 3 different classes who have completed speaking lessons in 1-3 semesters. This research employed qualitative study. In collecting the data, the researcher used interviews as a primary instrument. The results of this research indicated that there were two themes of challenges faced by EFL students in speaking English, including lack of vocabulary (academic word issues), and nervousness (communication apprehension). This research also revealed that there were four themes of differences in online and offline learning, including learning process (inattentiveness unmotivated, attentiveness and motivated), classroom activities (non-interactive and interactive learning), time management (undisciplined and disciplined learning), and learning outcomes (understanding the material). Last but not least, this research also pointed out that the participants used three strategies or potential solutions to overcome their challenges. Those strategies are metacognitive strategies (preparing vocabulary), cognitive strategies (entertainment platform), and social strategies (asking and practice). Finally, the transition era gives new experiences to students. They do not experience challenges in terms of environment and internet issue as they face during online learning.

Keywords
Challenges
Online-to-offline Transition
Speaking skills
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Introduction

As a global pandemic, COVID-19 has an impact on a variety of factors, including education. Learning is done online to prevent the Corona Virus disease (COVID-19) spread. This follows the Ministry of Education and Culture’s (Kemdikbud) policy, published in circular letter No. 4 of 2020. On the other hand, in March 2022, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia and the government reported that the number of COVID-19 cases in the country had declined. President Joko Widodo said face-to-face learning would be 100% available on May 17, 2022.

Likewise, as of August 22, 2022, offline learning has begun to be implemented in the speaking course, which was previously carried out online. Speaking course is one of the main subjects for English students at the English Department of one public university in Jambi. Speaking plays an essential role in teaching English, especially in the context of communication. Liu (2014) states that speaking is the means through which learners can make presentations, offer explanations, transmit information, describe things, make polite requests, and exchange ideas with others, or to express opinions. Speaking is the most crucial component in learning a second or foreign language. This statement is supported by Rao (2019), that “Speaking skill is the most important skill among the four language skills to communicate well in this globalized world.” (p. 6).

However, several problems have occurred. Many students are afraid of speaking English in front of their classmates. This is because English in Indonesia is a foreign language, where English is not the primary language. Students rarely use it in everyday life, as stated by Hamzah and Ting (2010), who found the fact that not all students have the courage to speak in front of their classmates because they feel insecure and have problems communicating and expressing themselves using the target language. Furthermore, Thornbury (2005) in Indrianty (2016) states that several factors that cause speech failure are lack of vocabulary, inappropriate grammar, and fear of mistakes.

In addition, speaking involves verbal and body language to produce effective communication, allowing the speaker and listener to build understanding and clarify misunderstandings. Considering the limited interaction between lecturers and students, it is difficult to communicate effectively in an online learning situation (Syafrayani, 2021). Since speakers and listeners cannot interact face-to-face, it is difficult to establish mutual understanding and is prone to misunderstandings. Moreover, poor internet connection in areas that do not support the internet sometimes occurs during virtual meetings because lecturers and students rely on internet connections to conduct virtual teaching and learning (Hafsari, 2022).

A number of previous related studies (Rahayu, 2020; Bich & Lian, 2021; Hafsari, 2021; Syafrayani, 2021; and Noviyanti, 2022) discuss about the obstacles or impacts of online learning in learning speaking skill during the pandemic, however, there are few studies including Damayanti and Rachmah (2022), Djafer et al., (2022), Fitriani
et al., (2020), and Rahmat (2022) investigate about students’ experiences in learning speaking skill in online-to-offline transition era, particularly in Jambi.

Based on the statements and information above, it can be seen that students have some challenges in learning speaking in online learning. However, the results of previous studies have not explained about transition era. So, the researchers conducted a research about the challenges faced by EFL students’ in learning speaking during online-to-offline transition era. The present study strives to answer the following questions: 1) what challenges did EFL students’ face in learning speaking skills in the online-to-offline-transition era?; 2) is there a difference between the experience of learning speaking skills during online and offline?; and 3) how do they overcome their challenges?

Method

The method of this research is qualitative research. Creswell (2012) stated that the qualitative data approach explores information from participants, and the results are in the form of words. The aim is to find meaning comprehensively on the challenges that EFL students face in learning speaking skills during the online-to-offline transition era and how they overcome these challenges.

For the research location and subject, this research was conducted in the English study program at one public university in Jambi and the subjects were five fourth-semester students who had studied speaking class during online learning and have now completed speaking class. They were randomly selected after agreeing to become participants through an informed consent form. The researchers only took 5 participants because the number of participants in qualitative research is usually 5 to 10 (Creswell, 2007). However, if data saturation has not been reached, the number of participants can be increased until the data described by participants have similarities or reach a saturation point. In this study, data saturation was obtained in the fifth participant.

To collect data in this study, the researchers used interviews as the main instrument. An interview is a meeting between two people to exchange information and ideas through question and answer to construct meaning on a particular topic (Esterberg, 2002). Creswell (2014) stated three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In this research, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. In the interview process, the researchers used protocol guidelines. The interview protocol was conducted by considering the theories in chapter two and instruments from several previous studies (Al hosni, 2014; Quyen et al, 2018; Pratolo, 2019).

To analyze the data, this study used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is one way to analyze data to identify patterns or find themes through researchers’ data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun & Clarke (2016), There are six phases in analyzing the data including, familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, naming and defining themes, and report writing.
Results

The research findings consist of three main points based on the research questions. The first research question explored EFL students’ challenges in learning speaking during the online-to-offline transition era. The second question focused on the differences in learning speaking when learning online and offline. The third question focused on students’ potential solutions or strategies to overcome the challenges.

1. Challenges in Learning Speaking During Online-to-Offline Transition Era

According to the participants who participated in this research, they faced some challenges in developing their speaking skills. Two interrelated themes are found in the interviews including, lack of vocabulary and nervousness. Each theme also has more than one sub-theme, which can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of vocabulary</td>
<td>Academic word issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness</td>
<td>Communication Apprehension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of Vocabulary: *Academic word issues*

The researchers observed that the participants had different opinions on their challenges when learning speaking offline. On the one hand, three participants pointed out that they had challenges in academic word issues. S1 claimed that vocabulary was her most significant challenge in learning speaking due to limited knowledge of vocabulary. She stated:

“Vocabulary is a big challenge for me when learning speaking offline, because I don’t know a lot of vocabulary”

On the other hand, 2 participants said that vocabulary is not a challenge in learning speaking. S2 explicitly stated:

“In a vocabulary challenge, I don’t have too many problems. Because I frequently come across words that I am unfamiliar with.”

From the interview results, it can be highlighted that most participants pointed out that vocabulary was their challenge. This can be proven by looking at the number of participants who experienced challenges in vocabulary.

Nervousness: *Communication Apprehension*

Communication apprehension can be defined as the fear of communicating with other people. The effects that emerge from communication apprehension are closely related to fear of negative evaluation, insecure, blank, confused, lack of concentration, and don’t know what to say. Based on the data found from the results one of the participants revealed that he had difficulty developing speaking skills because he felt nervous and had trouble concentrating, which caused confusion and difficulty putting thoughts into words. He stated:
“I feel nervous, which results in what I’m talking about not being in accordance with what I think. Meaning that sometimes I have prepared what I want to talk about in my head, but because I’m nervous when I speak, it’s blank”

In inverse proportion to the interview results above, two participants stated that they did not experience nervousness when learning speaking offline. S2 confirmed that offline learning made her more courageous in speaking English. She said:

“As for having anxiety, at first when I studied online, I was still anxious, because I was still afraid to speak, but from online to offline, I got used to it.”

Based on the results of the interviews, most of the participants confirmed that nervousness was a challenge in learning to speak during the transition period. These challenges included being evaluated, blank, and lack of topic knowledge.

### 2. Differences between online and offline learning

After conducting interviews with participants, four themes emerged, including the learning process, classroom activities, time management, and learning outcomes. The four themes have several sub-themes, which can be seen in the following table:

**Table 2. Themes and sub-themes of differences in online and offline learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Online Learning</th>
<th>Offline Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Process</td>
<td>Inattentiveness</td>
<td>Attentiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unmotivated</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classroom activities</td>
<td>Non-interactive learning</td>
<td>Interactive learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Undisciplined learning</td>
<td>Disciplined Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>Difficult to Understanding Material</td>
<td>Understanding Material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning Process**

#### 1. Inattentiveness

Participants in the learning process frequently encounter saturated situations for various reasons. S2 explicitly stated that when learning online, she often did not pay attention to the lecturer when explaining the material. She said:

“I frequently find it difficult to focus when listening to lecturers, because we don’t look directly at each other, it could be that the camera is active but we can still see our cellphone, and so on.”
The findings of the interviews showed that the participants ignored what the lecturer explained when studying online because they could not see the lecturer face-to-face. As a result, they did unimportant things unrelated to learning.

2. Unmotivated

Besides inattentiveness, the researchers found that unmotivated is the second sub-theme. The two interviewed participants said online classes did not motivate them to learn. As S4 said:

“Online learning does not really facilitate learning speaking to the fullest, so there is no incentive for us to improve our speaking skills to be better.”

Some of the sub-themes above have discussed students' online learning experiences. The sub-themes are inattentiveness and unmotivated. The following section describes students' offline learning experiences. Researchers discovered sub-themes such as attentiveness and motivation.

1. Attentiveness

After conducting the interviews, the researcher found that attentiveness was one of the sub-themes identified. One of the participants mentioned that he was more focused when learning offline. For instance, S1 said:

“When offline learning is more focuses on paying attention when the lecturer delivers the material.”

According to the findings above, offline learning causes participants to pay closer attention to the lecturer's explanation

2. Motivated

Motivation is essential in encouraging student interest in learning. Motivated students will more easily achieve their learning goals. In this research, motivation is one of the identified sub-themes. Participants felt that learning offline boosted their spirits. As S3 said in the interview:

“As I mentioned earlier, the 'debate' spurred my ambition. Because in speaking, interaction is important, so it makes me understand more about speaking.”

The preceding explanation explained how offline learning increases participants' enthusiasm for learning

Classroom Activities

1. Non Interactive Learning

The data obtained from the interview results show that in online learning, the interaction between lecturers and students and between one student and another is not well established. As mentioned by the participants in the interview:

“ When learning online, the interaction between lecturers and students is not conveyed. Because when studying online, many don't speak in class, only part of it ”
“Online is not interactive because the activities tend to be monotonous; it’s like listening to videos, and just looking for the main ideas”

It can be concluded from the data above that when learning online, the interaction between students and lecturers and between students and other students is very lacking and learning is not interactive. This includes only a few people wanting to talk, and activities are monotonous.

2. Interactive Learning

In contrast to online learning, offline learning creates interactive learning. Interactive learning emphasizes interaction between teachers and students. Students are expected to be active in the learning process by conducting discussions, responding, and asking questions. In this study, three of the five interviewed pointed out that offline learning creates interactive classes. In this case, S3 mentioned:

“Whereas when offline, there is more interaction with lecturers, and the lecturer definitely told us to answer a few questions and have lots of interaction too.”

Similarly, S5 also said:

“When offline the class atmosphere is more interactive, there are lots of discussions, issuing arguments, or debating about the material to be discussed, and that trains my speaking skills”

The explanations provided for some of the responses made it clear that classes for offline learning typically involve more varied and interactive activities, such as frequent discussions, arguments, and debates about the subject matter, which ultimately encourage critical thinking and enhance speaking abilities.

Time management

1. Undisciplined Learning

Based on the interview results, participants revealed that when learning online, they often experience undisciplined classes, such as time constraints and violations of rules. The following is a quote from one of the participants, S4:

“Class activities when online are not optimal; it should be 4 credits, but sometimes only 2 credits are fulfilled”

From the explanation above, in online learning, there are often violations of teaching and learning rules, which cause the learning process to be delayed. Moreover, it affects the duration of learning; time limitations mean that lecturers do not provide sufficient explanations about the material, and participants only have a little time to absorb and understand the material.

2. Disciplined Learning

In contrast to online learning, offline learning creates a more disciplined class. The data showed from the interview results that the learning time follows the provisions during offline learning, and the class is also orderly. As stated by one of the participants, S2 said:

“When offline the lecturer teaches longer.”
The data presented above indicated that offline learning provides more opportunities for participants to learn more optimally than online.

**Learning Outcomes: Understanding Material**

Based on the results of the interviews, understanding material is a sub-theme found by researcher. Through offline learning, participants better understand learning. S1 expressed:

“When offline learning is more focused on paying attention when the lecturer delivers the material. The point is, I understand the lesson better when offline learning.”

Moreover, S2 also expressed his opinion about the understanding of learning. She said:

“In terms of understanding, I find it easier to understand when studying offline. Because I can see firsthand what is being said, and the person explaining it”

The responses of some of the participants above explained that participants believed offline learning provided more understanding. This is because the lecturer gives a direct explanation. They do not experience this when learning online because of distance constraints.

### 3. Strategies to Solve the Challenges in Learning Speaking

Learning strategies are specific actions or techniques that students use to enhance their progress in understanding and producing language. Based on the interview results, the researcher found three strategies used by the participants to handle speaking challenges, including preparing vocabulary, entertainment platform, and asking and practice.

**Table 3. Themes of the participant’s strategies to solve the challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment Platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking And Practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preparing Vocabulary**

Preparing vocabulary is included in one of the strategies used by participants, namely metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategy are students’ abilities to plan, control, and evaluate the learning process. As identified in the themes, preparing vocabulary were used by the participants as a way for them to solve their
challenges. Two of the five interviewed revealed that they used this strategy to handle challenges in speaking. As stated by S1:

“I usually prepare vocabulary before learning speaking, so I have to find the vocabulary first so I can speak”

Another participant, S2, addressed that the strategy she used was to write down every new vocabulary she heard. She said:

“When I hear a new word from my lecturer or friends when we are speaking English, I write it down in a small note, then I will find out what it means”

It can be concluded from the explanation above that preparing vocabulary is a problem solver for some participants to overcome their challenges in lack of vocabulary.

Entertainment Platform

Entertainment platform is another strategy used by EFL learners, this strategy is included in cognitive strategies, that can help learners understand and produce the target language through actions such as repeating, practicing the sounds of English, and analyzing the language in contrast. The results of the data obtained from the interviews found that the entertainment platform used by the participants to develop their speaking challenges, including watching YouTube, using the OME application, and using English subtitles. The following are excerpts from participants about the entertainment platform they used.

“I sometimes also like to watch YouTuber content from Westerners so I can learn how to speak English according to native speakers.”

“I often use the OME application to talk to friends who are abroad, so I train myself to speak directly with native speakers”

From the explanation above, several of the participants used platforms for entertainment to help them learn the target language by doing things like repeating, practicing English sounds, and imitating.

Asking and practice

Asking and practice is the last theme in the EFL students' strategy for overcoming speaking challenges. This relates to all social activities, such as question-asking, cooperation, and empathy. Research indicates that social strategy is the most widely used. All interviewed participants disclosed using social strategies to overcome their speaking challenges. Three of the five interviewed stated that asking their friends for help was a strategy to overcome challenges in their speaking skills. As S1 said:

“If I don't understand the meaning of the vocabulary, for example, I ask a friend who is smarter.”

Rather than asking, S5 prefer to practice. She indicated that practicing with friends helped her overcome challenges. She stated in the interview:

“The social strategy that I use is practicing with a friend to speak English, because as I mentioned earlier I struggle a bit with vocabulary”
Several of the responses above confirmed that asking and practice in developing speaking skills is crucial. With asking, they can correct if there are speaking mistakes and inquire about unfamiliar topics. Then practicing will help them get used to speaking English.

**Discussion**

**EFL students’ challenges in learning speaking skills in the online-to-offline-transition era**

Based on the data obtained, EFL students’ faced challenges in developing their speaking skills. The researchers discovered that the students experienced two main challenges. These challenges including, vocabulary and nervousness. According to Richards (2002), "Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides many foundations for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write.” (p. 255). Three of the five participants in this study indicated that they experienced challenges with lack of vocabulary. A lack of vocabulary makes it difficult for participants to communicate in English. As stated by S1 in the interview, vocabulary is the biggest challenge in learning speaking. She has difficulty speaking English due to her limited vocabulary. The results of this study were in line with the findings of Abrar et al. (2018), which stated that vocabulary was the primary concern of participants in English.

Aside from vocabulary, other challenges come from nervousness. Abrar et al. (2022) stated that speaking and anxiety are interrelated, where speaking causes anxiety for foreign language learners. According to the research data, three participants reported feeling nervous when speaking English. One participant, S5, said in an interview that she felt anxious about speaking English when she did not master the topic of conversation. The findings of this study turned out to have similarities with the results of the study of Bogodad et al. (2021). In their research, the participants stated that lack of knowledge is the biggest problem that can cause student anxiety.

**The experience of learning speaking skills during online and offline**

After presenting the findings regarding the data challenges EFL students’ faced in speaking English, the researchers will then explain some of the differences between online and offline learning found in the study. These differences include the learning process (inattentiveness and unmotivated), classroom activities (non-interactive and interactive learning), time management (undisciplined and disciplined learning), and learning outcomes (understanding the material).

This study's results revealed differences in the learning process when done online and offline. There are two differences found in the research, including inattentiveness and motivated. Three participants said that in online learning, they frequently did not pay attention and lacked motivation. This finding is in line with Djafar et al. (2022). In their research, they found that online learning reduced learning motivation. In contrast, several participants stated that offline learning creates an attentive and motivated learning process in line with the results of Rahmat (2022), which mentioned that students focus more on the teachers' explanations delivered in the classroom.

Beside learning process, the results of the study found that classroom activities for online and offline learning were different. These differences include non-interactive
learning (online learning) and interactive learning (offline learning). The data revealed that when online learning interactions between lecturers and students or between one student and another student are not well established, three participants support this opinion. They say online learning activities are very monotonous and lack of interaction. This findings support Damayanti & Rachmah (2020), where found that online learning has less interaction between lecturers and students. In contrast to online learning, classroom activities that are conducted offline are more interactive. Several interviewees stated that class activities were more varied and interactive when learning offline. This finding was also revealed in another study by Rahmat (2022), which mentioned that offline learning creates learning activities that are more varied and lively.

Apart from classroom activities, the difference between online and offline learning is time management. Based on the findings in the study, three participants revealed that they frequently encountered undisciplined online classes, such as time constraints and rule violations. The results of this study support Amir et al. (2020). In their research, participants faced challenges due to unstable connections in learning activities. Meanwhile, other participants mentioned in the interview results that when studying offline, the study time followed the provisions, and the class was also orderly, so participants had more time to be able to understand and absorb the learning material.

Learning outcomes are the final findings on the differences between online and offline learning. According to research, participant learning outcomes during offline learning were better than during online learning. The two participants in this study stated that offline learning provides more understanding because the lecturer provides direct explanations. Due to distance constraints, they do not have this experience when studying online. The research results are in line with Damayanti & Rachmah (2020), where they found in research that participants gain a better understanding in class because there is an opportunity to interact directly with explanations from lecturers or other students.

**Students’ strategies to overcome their challenges in learning speaking skill during the transition era**

After getting data about the challenges in speaking English and the differences between online and offline learning, the researchers also found several strategies used by students to overcome their challenges in developing speaking skills. To discuss this, the researchers divided the students' solutions into three parts to solve the challenge. These solutions are a metacognitive strategy, a cognitive strategy, and a social strategy.

The study findings determined that students used metacognitive strategies to manage or reduce speaking challenges. The solution, or potential method, used by students is to prepare vocabulary. Through this strategy, students find it helpful in minimizing their challenges with a lack of vocabulary. This is supported by the findings of Wael (2018), which stated that one of the students prepared a dictionary to understand the lecturer's words. Here, it can be seen that students tend to prepare and organize their learning concerning speaking.

Beside metacognitive strategies, the cognitive strategies turned out to be another potential solution found by researchers. The solutions used by students are entertainment platforms, including watching YouTube, using the OME application,
and using English subtitles. Of the three solutions mentioned above, watching YouTube is mostly used by students. The reason students chose this strategy as the one they used the most was to help them understand the target language through actions such as repeating, practicing English sounds, and imitating. This solution was also revealed in another study by Purwaningsih (2018), where students carried out several repetitive activities, like what they saw from the learning experience. Like practicing English sounds, speaking like a native speaker, and watching English TV shows or movies.

The last strategy found by researchers is social strategy. This strategy ranks first among the strategies used by students to overcome their speaking challenges. The results showed that all participants used this strategy because it was related to social activities such as asking questions and working together. The first strategy found was to ask friends who know better. As mentioned in the findings section, participants stated that asking friends would help them overcome their challenges. Two participants said they practiced speaking English with friends. The results of this study support Wael (2018). The results of his research found students use social strategies by asking for clarification from friends, lecturers, and family.

The results of present study indicate that EFL students still had challenges in learning speaking skill during the transition era. Students had lack of vocabulary and nervousness. Comparing students’ experiences in learning speaking skill between online learning and offline learning after the pandemic, interestingly it is found that students prefer to learning speaking skill face-to-face. These differences include the learning process (inattentiveness and unmotivated), classroom activities (non-interactive and interactive learning), time management (undisciplined and disciplined learning), and learning outcomes (understanding the material). In addition, participants in this study applied some strategies to overcome their challenges in learning speaking skill during online-to-offline learning. Those strategies were metacognitive strategy, cognitive strategy, and social strategy. In short, students tend to adapt the mode of learning speaking skills by managing the challenges they faced in transition era. The results of study are beneficial to give more insights for lecturers to implement appropriate teaching techniques in speaking course.

**Conclusion**

EFL students in this present study still had challenges in learning speaking skills during online-to-offline transition era. They had academic word issue and communication apprehension to communicate in English. In addition, participants in this study preferred to offline learning because they became attentive and motivated. The classroom atmosphere was more interactive and disciplined. The most important thing is students had understood the materials. Interestingly, participants in this study used several strategies to cope with their challenges in learning speaking skills during the transition era. Students prepared their vocabulary, used entertainment platform and asked other people and practiced. For future research, to get more comprehensive data it is recommended to add other research instruments, for examples, focus group discussion, observations or documents. The present study only focused on students’ points of view, however, next research can explore lecturers’ experiences in teaching speaking skills during the transition era.
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References


