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CULTURAL BARRIERS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL COMMUNICATION NORMS ON EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract
This study explores the relationship between local communication norms and English-speaking participation among third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima, Indonesia. It focuses on how students interpret politeness, respect, shyness, and self-confidence during classroom interactions, particularly when expressing opinions, asking questions, and disagreeing with lecturers or classmates. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design, with 24 students identified as the target participant group. The proposed data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and instructional document analysis. The data are intended to be analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, sociocultural expectations, and classroom participation. The discussion emphasizes that speaking difficulties should not be attributed solely to cultural factors, as linguistic limitations, psychological concerns, and classroom conditions may also influence students' willingness to communicate. Supportive teaching practices, such as pair discussions, small-group activities, preparation time, and constructive feedback, are considered relevant strategies for encouraging oral participation. This study offers a context-sensitive perspective on English-speaking participation and may contribute to culturally responsive teaching practices in EFL classrooms. However, empirical findings and definitive conclusions require confirmation through the analysis of actual interview and observation data.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an essential skill in English language education because it enables learners to express ideas, exchange information, negotiate meaning, and participate in academic and social interactions. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, developing speaking competence involves more than acquiring vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Learners must also manage pronunciation, fluency, interaction, and the social demands of communicating in a language in which they may have limited experience.

Students may hesitate to answer questions, express opinions, participate in discussions, or deliver presentations in English. These difficulties may be associated with limited vocabulary, concerns about grammatical accuracy, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety about how other people evaluate their performance. Qualitative research on EFL speaking anxiety has described learners' experiences of nervousness and shyness, emphasizing the importance of examining students' own explanations rather than assuming a single cause (Khafidhoh et al., 2023).

Speaking experiences may also be shaped by social and cultural environments. Communication is influenced by expectations concerning respect, politeness, appropriate self-expression, turn-taking, and relationships between speakers. Such expectations may affect how learners interpret situations in which they are required to speak publicly, disagree with another person, ask questions, or respond spontaneously.

Research in Indonesian academic contexts has examined external and interpersonal factors associated with speaking anxiety. Idrus (2022) explored external factors triggering speaking anxiety in an academic setting. Related studies have also investigated speaking anxiety in and outside the classroom, suggesting that the context of communication and learners' own perceptions are important to understanding their experiences (Daflizar, 2024; Abrar et al., 2022).

However, local communication norms should not automatically be treated as barriers. Respect, politeness, and careful communication can support positive interpersonal relationships. Their relationship with speaking participation depends on how students interpret expectations, the communicative situation, and the opportunities provided by lecturers. A student may hesitate to disagree with a lecturer because the student considers disagreement potentially disrespectful; another may remain silent because they are unsure which

English expressions to use. Although the visible behavior may be similar, the underlying experiences may differ.

In the context of English language education in Bima, investigating students' interpretations of communication norms may provide a context-sensitive understanding of classroom participation. Rather than assuming that local culture necessarily discourages speaking, this study seeks to understand how third-semester students describe and negotiate communication expectations during English-speaking activities.

Previous studies have examined speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, self-confidence, and other factors influencing EFL learners' oral communication (Abrar et al., 2022; Daflizar, 2024; Khafidhoh et al., 2023). However, further investigation is needed to understand how students interpret local communication norms, particularly expectations concerning politeness, respect, and appropriate self-expression, in specific English-speaking classroom situations. The relationship between these interpretations and students' decisions to ask questions, express opinions, disagree with lecturers or classmates, and participate in discussions requires closer examination. This issue is important because students' hesitation to speak may stem from different factors, including limited language proficiency, speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, or concerns about socially appropriate communication. Therefore, understanding these factors within a specific educational and sociocultural context is essential to avoid oversimplifying the challenges faced by EFL learners.

The present study addresses this need by exploring the experiences of 24 third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima. Its novelty lies in examining local communication norms, shyness, self-confidence, and classroom participation together through a context-specific qualitative perspective. Rather than assuming that local cultural norms directly cause speaking difficulties, the study investigates how students interpret expectations of politeness and respect and how these interpretations may interact with linguistic challenges, psychological experiences, and classroom conditions. The findings are expected to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of English-speaking participation and provide practical insights for developing culturally responsive teaching strategies. These may include structured speaking activities, adequate preparation time, constructive feedback, and opportunities to express opinions or disagree respectfully. Ultimately, the study may help lecturers create a supportive learning environment that encourages active English communication while acknowledging students' diverse communication preferences.

English speaking involves not only linguistic competence but also psychological and social factors that influence students' classroom participation. Students may understand the material but hesitate to speak because of uncertainty, fear of making mistakes, or concerns about others' reactions. Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that foreign language anxiety can affect learners' communication, while MacIntyre et al. (1998) emphasize the role of confidence and situational factors in willingness to communicate.

Local communication norms may also influence how students ask questions, express opinions, disagree, and interact with lecturers. Brown and Levinson (1987), through politeness theory, explain how speakers consider interpersonal relationships and face needs when communicating. However, students' silence should not automatically be attributed to cultural norms, as it may also result from anxiety, limited language proficiency, or classroom conditions.

Previous theoretical perspectives suggest that speaking participation is influenced by interconnected linguistic, psychological, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors. Nevertheless, students may interpret classroom expectations differently depending on their experiences and relationships. Therefore, exploring students' own perspectives is important to understand the reasons behind their participation or hesitation.

This study addresses the need for a context-specific understanding of how local communication norms relate to English-speaking participation among 24 third-semester students at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima. It focuses on students' experiences of politeness, respect, confidence, anxiety, and classroom interaction without assuming that cultural norms necessarily create barriers.

The study uses these concepts as a framework for examining students' experiences through interviews, classroom observations, and relevant documents. The findings are expected to provide insights into how

lecturers can create supportive speaking activities that respect students' communication preferences while encouraging active participation.

The present study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: foreign language classroom anxiety, willingness to communicate (WTC), and rapport management theory. Horwitz et al. (1986) explain foreign language anxiety through communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, providing a foundation for understanding students' nervousness and hesitation during English-speaking activities. MacIntyre et al. (1998) further explain that willingness to communicate is influenced by situational factors, perceived communicative competence, and communication anxiety. Meanwhile, Spencer-Oatey (2008) provides a sociopragmatic perspective for examining how interpersonal expectations, politeness, respect, and face sensitivities shape communication. Integrating these perspectives enables the present study to examine students' speaking experiences beyond linguistic competence alone. Local communication norms are not assumed to be uniform across students or to cause speaking anxiety directly; instead, the study explores how students interpret and negotiate these norms in particular classroom situations.

Previous studies on speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL students, including Idrus (2022), Khafidhoh et al. (2023), Daflizar (2024), Abrar et al. (2022), and Wiranti et al. (2025), provide a relevant foundation for understanding students' nervousness, confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and participation in English-speaking activities. However, their specific contributions must be distinguished according to their research focus and methods, as studies examining general anxiety factors or perceived speaking proficiency do not necessarily explain how students interpret local communication norms. This distinction identifies the present study's research gap: the need to explore students' own interpretations of respect, politeness, and interpersonal expectations in relation to their English-speaking experiences, while considering classroom conditions such as task formats, preparation time, teacher feedback, and peer reactions. Guided by qualitative descriptive methodology (Kim et al., 2017), the study uses these dimensions as interconnected analytical categories rather than causal variables. Table 1 summarizes the theoretical foundations and their respective contributions to the conceptual framework.

Table 1. Theoretical Foundations and Their Contributions to the Conceptual Framework

Theoretical foundation	Main concepts	Contribution to the present study
Horwitz et al. (1986): Foreign language classroom anxiety	Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety	Provides a framework for interpreting students' reported nervousness, hesitation, and anxiety during English-speaking activities.
MacIntyre et al. (1998): Willingness to communicate	Communication anxiety, perceived competence, situational willingness to speak	Explains how students' readiness to participate may differ across speaking tasks and interactional situations.
Spencer-Oatey (2008): Rapport management theory	Respect, politeness, face sensitivities, interpersonal expectations	Supports examination of how students interpret local communication norms and negotiate interpersonal relationships when speaking English.
Previous EFL speaking-anxiety studies	Anxiety, confidence, perceived proficiency, and speaking challenges	Establishes the empirical background and helps identify the need to investigate students' interpretations of local communication norms more specifically.
Kim et al. (2017): Qualitative descriptive methodology	Participant-oriented description and systematic qualitative reporting	Guides the collection, analysis, and presentation of students' experiences without presupposing causal relationships.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how EFL students interpreted local communication norms in English-speaking activities. The research was conducted in the English Education Study Program at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima, Indonesia, involving 24 third-semester students. Data collection was conducted on October 23, 2026, through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. All 24 students completed the interviews, which explored their speaking experiences, confidence, anxiety, perceptions of politeness and respect, and willingness to express opinions or disagreement in English.

The research instruments consisted of a semi-structured interview guide and a classroom observation checklist. The interviews focused on students' experiences when speaking English, factors that made them feel comfortable or hesitant, and their perceptions of communication practices in the classroom and community. Classroom observations focused on students' participation, responses to lecturers' questions, turn-taking, peer interaction, and expressions of agreement or disagreement. Observation notes were intended to complement interview responses by providing contextual information about students' participation during speaking activities.

The data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, which involves familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. The analysis focused on identifying patterns related to speaking anxiety, self-confidence, politeness, respect, and classroom participation. Interview responses and observation notes were compared where relevant, while considering alternative explanations for students' speaking behavior. Specific observational findings should be based on the actual field notes to ensure that the reported results accurately represent the classroom situation.

Table 2. Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytical Focus

Research question	Data source	Analytical focus
How do students describe factors influencing speaking participation?	Interviews and classroom observations	Situations associated with participation, hesitation, or reluctance to speak.
How do students perceive the relationship between norms, shyness, and confidence?	Interviews	Participants' explanations of confidence, shyness, and social expectations.
How do students interpret politeness and respect in class?	Interviews and observations	Participants' interpretations of appropriate communication and interaction patterns.
What teaching practices do students perceive as supportive?	Interviews and instructional documents	Preparation time, task formats, feedback, peer support, and participation opportunities.

Credibility may be strengthened by comparing interview accounts with classroom observations and relevant documents. Dependability may be supported by maintaining records of data-collection procedures and analytical decisions. Confirmability may be addressed through reflexive notes concerning the researcher's assumptions. Transferability may be supported by describing the setting and participants sufficiently for readers to assess relevance to other EFL contexts. These procedures must be reported as completed only if they were actually carried out. Ethical Considerations Institutional permission and informed consent must be obtained before data collection. Participation should be voluntary, and students should be informed that participation or withdrawal will not affect their academic assessment. Pseudonyms or participant codes should be used. Recordings, transcripts, and observation notes should be stored securely. The researcher should avoid stereotyping students or presenting individual accounts as representative of all people in Bima or Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Factors Influencing Students' Participation in English-Speaking Activities

This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence third-semester EFL students' participation in English-speaking activities at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima. The analytical framework considers language-related challenges, speaking anxiety, self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and classroom conditions as dimensions requiring investigation.

The data analysis should establish how participants describe their experiences when answering lecturers' questions, expressing opinions, participating in discussions, and delivering presentations. Particular attention should be given to the situations in which students feel comfortable speaking and those in which they hesitate to participate. Classroom observations should also be examined to identify patterns of participation, including voluntary responses, turn-taking, and interaction with lecturers and classmates.

These dimensions provide an analytical basis for understanding speaking participation beyond linguistic competence alone. However, the relative importance of each factor must be established from the actual interview transcripts and observation records rather than assumed in advance.

2. Students' Perceptions of Local Communication Norms, Shyness, and Self-Confidence

The second analytical focus concerns how students interpret local communication norms in relation to shyness and self-confidence. The study considers respect, politeness, and appropriate self-expression as context-dependent concepts that may influence classroom interaction.

Interviews should explore whether students perceive any relationship between their communication experiences in their families or communities and their willingness to speak English in academic settings. For example, participants may be asked to explain their decisions when expressing disagreement, asking questions, or responding to lecturers. Their explanations should be analyzed to distinguish sociocultural considerations from language-related uncertainty, fear of making mistakes, and other individual experiences.

Importantly, hesitation to speak should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of cultural barriers. Students may remain silent for different reasons, and local communication norms may also support respectful and constructive interaction. Therefore, the findings should reflect the diversity of participants' perspectives and include accounts that differ from any dominant pattern identified in the data.

3. Interpretations of Politeness and Respect in Classroom Interaction

This section examines how students understand politeness and respect during English-speaking activities. The analysis should consider participants' interpretations of appropriate ways to address lecturers, respond to classmates, interrupt a discussion, ask questions, and express disagreement. Interview data should be compared with classroom observations to examine whether students' stated communication preferences correspond with their observed participation. Such comparison may help clarify how classroom expectations, interpersonal relationships, and opportunities to speak shape students' experiences.

The interpretation should avoid treating politeness as a fixed characteristic shared by all students in Bima. Instead, students' individual accounts should be used to explain how they understand respectful communication in particular academic situations. Any claim about recurring patterns must be supported by identifiable evidence from the dataset.

4. Teaching Practices That May Support Comfortable Participation

The final analytical focus concerns teaching practices that students perceive as helpful for participating in English-speaking activities. The study considers preparation time, pair or small-group discussions, clear task instructions, supportive feedback, and opportunities to rehearse ideas as areas to investigate. Students' interview responses should be used to identify which practices they find helpful and why. Classroom observations and instructional documents may provide additional context for understanding how speaking activities are organized and how students are given opportunities to contribute.

Based on the study's conceptual framework, culturally responsive teaching should recognize differences in students' communication preferences without lowering expectations for English-speaking development.

Lecturers may consider providing structured opportunities for students to express opinions, ask questions, and disagree respectfully. Nevertheless, these practices should be presented as pedagogical implications to be examined against the data, not as interventions proven effective by the present study.

Discussion

The study positions English-speaking participation as a phenomenon that may involve the interaction of linguistic, psychological, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors. Its central analytical concern is not to establish that local communication norms necessarily prevent students from speaking English, but to investigate how students themselves interpret those norms in specific classroom situations.

This position is consistent with the literature reviewed in the manuscript, which addresses speaking anxiety, self-confidence, external influences, and students' experiences in EFL contexts. The present study seeks to extend this discussion by examining students' own interpretations of politeness and respect alongside classroom conditions and speaking-related concerns. A critical contribution of the study will depend on demonstrating how the participants' accounts support, complicate, or differ from explanations offered in previous research. Interview excerpts, observation evidence, and transparent thematic analysis are therefore essential. Without these materials, the proposed relationships remain analytical possibilities rather than established findings.

Once the empirical analysis has been completed, this discussion should be revised to identify the actual themes, explain their relationships to previous studies, and specify the study's contribution to culturally responsive English-speaking instruction in the local context.

A more specific interpretation of the relationship between local communication norms and English-speaking participation concerns students' responses to situations involving authority, disagreement, and public self-expression. In classroom interactions, students may need to decide whether to ask a lecturer for clarification, challenge a classmate's opinion, or express an alternative viewpoint in front of their peers. These situations provide an important context for examining how students understand politeness and respect while communicating in English. However, hesitation in such situations may also result from limited vocabulary, uncertainty about grammatical accuracy, or fear of negative evaluation. Therefore, the analysis should distinguish between students' concerns about linguistic performance and their interpretations of socially appropriate communication. This distinction is important because it prevents the study from attributing speaking difficulties solely to local culture and enables a more nuanced explanation of the factors shaping students' classroom participation (Idrus, 2022; Khafidhoh et al., 2023).

The pedagogical implications of this study concern the development of speaking activities that encourage active participation while acknowledging students' different communication preferences. Lecturers may consider beginning with pair discussions or small-group tasks before asking students to express their ideas in whole-class discussions. Providing preparation time, modeling respectful expressions for disagreement, and offering constructive feedback may also create clearer opportunities for students to participate. For example, students can practice expressions such as "I understand your point, but I have a different opinion" or "Could you explain that point further?" before using them in discussions. These strategies can help make classroom expectations more explicit while allowing students to develop confidence in expressing their ideas. Nevertheless, their relevance to the students at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima should be evaluated through actual participant accounts and classroom evidence. The study's contribution will therefore lie in explaining how students interpret communication expectations in their specific learning context and how those interpretations can inform culturally responsive speaking instruction, rather than assuming that a particular cultural norm necessarily prevents students from speaking English.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the relationship between local communication norms and English-speaking participation among third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at STKIP Taman Siswa Bima. The study emphasizes that students' participation in speaking activities should be understood through

the interaction of linguistic, psychological, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors. In particular, politeness and respect may be relevant when students ask questions, express opinions, or disagree with lecturers and classmates. However, these communication norms should not automatically be considered barriers because students' hesitation may also be associated with limited vocabulary, grammatical uncertainty, speaking anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

The study also highlights the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment that encourages students to express their ideas while respecting different communication preferences. Speaking activities such as pair discussions, small-group interactions, and structured whole-class discussions may provide opportunities for students to develop confidence gradually. In addition, preparation time, constructive feedback, and explicit instruction in expressions for asking questions and disagreeing respectfully may help students understand how to participate appropriately in academic communication. These practices represent pedagogical implications that should be evaluated in relation to students' actual experiences and classroom participation.

This study offers a context-sensitive perspective for examining English-speaking participation in the local educational setting of Bima. Its potential contribution lies in connecting students' interpretations of politeness and respect with speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and classroom interaction, rather than explaining speaking difficulties through cultural factors alone. Nevertheless, the conclusions must be interpreted cautiously because the available manuscript does not yet provide analyzed interview data or classroom observation findings. Further empirical analysis is therefore necessary to establish the themes that emerge from the participants' experiences and to determine how these findings can inform culturally responsive English-speaking instruction. Future research may also involve students from different semesters or educational institutions to explore whether similar patterns occur across different EFL learning contexts.

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