COGNITIVE FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH SPEAKING IN THE CLASSROOM AMONG THE THIRD SEMESTER ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS AT NUSA CENDANA UNIVERSITY IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2024/2025

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Vocabulary limitations, grammar difficulties, pronunciation issues, inhibition, and mother tongue influence	This study investigates the cognitive factors affecting English-speaking proficiency among third-semester students of the English Department at Nusa Cendana University. The researcher aims to identify specific cognitive barriers and their underlying causes that hinder students' ability to speak English fluently in classroom settings. The researcher used a descriptive qualitative method, and data were collected through classroom observations, structured interviews, and note-taking with 20 randomly selected students. The findings reveal that students face significant challenges in five key areas: vocabulary limitations, grammar difficulties, pronunciation issues, inhibition (nervousness and hesitation), and mother tongue influence. Vocabulary limitations were the most prevalent, with students struggling to recall words, express ideas, and use academic language effectively. Grammar challenges, particularly with tenses and sentence structure, led to frequent errors and hesitation. Pronunciation issues, especially with complex words, affected students' confidence and fluency. Inhibition, including situational nervousness and performance anxiety, further limited students' participation, and confidence. Additionally, mother tongue influence caused students to switch between Bahasa Indonesia and English, often due to nervousness or vocabulary gaps. Despite these challenges, students employed various coping strategies, such as extensive preparation, improvisation, and simplification techniques, to complete their presentations. The study concludes that addressing these cognitive barriers through targeted interventions, such as structured vocabulary training, grammar reinforcement, pronunciation practice, and confidence-building activities, can significantly improve students' English-speaking proficiency. The findings provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to enhance English language teaching methods and classroom practices, ultimately fostering better student academic outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in human communication as it allows people to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas, build relationships, and understand cultural values (Rabiah, 2018; Bonvillain, 2020). With over 7,000 languages spoken globally (Leben, 2016), six are recognized as international, including English, which is the most widely used (United Nations, 2024). As a global language, English is essential in many fields, especially in developing countries like Indonesia, where it serves as a bridge to access knowledge, science, and international opportunities (Prafitasari, 2021; Cahyanti & Wuri, 2017).

Despite its importance, learning English, particularly speaking, remains a challenge for Indonesian students as it is a foreign language (Daar, 2020). In schools, English is taught with a focus on four skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Among these, speaking is crucial for effective communication and participation in the global workforce (Asramadhani & Murni, 2013).

To speak fluently, students must master vocabulary, grammar, and speaking in various contexts. However, factors such as affective (e.g., confidence, fear) and cognitive (e.g., memory, focus, vocabulary) issues often hinder their performance (Jumarni et al., 2023; Hayes, 2023). In particular, cognitive factors like pronunciation, grammar use, and mother tongue interference affect students' speaking abilities (Chand, 2021). This research focuses on identifying the cognitive factors and their underlying causes that influence the English-speaking performance of third-semester students at Nusa Cendana University. Based on the explanation above, the researcher conducted research under the title "Cognitive Factors Affecting English Speaking in the Classroom Among the Third-Semester English Department Students at Nusa Cendana University."

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to explore the cognitive factors influencing the English-speaking performance of third-semester students in the English Department at Nusa Cendana University during the 2024/2025 academic year. From a total population of 155 students across four classes (3A, 3B, 3C, and 3D), a sample of 20 students was randomly selected, with five students representing each class. The researcher used three main instruments to collect data: observation, interview, and note-taking. Observations were carried out using an observation sheet to examine students' speaking performance in class, including their presentations, responses, and ability to express ideas. Structured interviews consisting of 20 open-ended questions were conducted to gather in-depth information about students' difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and the influence of their mother tongue. During the interviews, the researcher also took notes and used a phone recorder to ensure accurate data collection. The data collection process included obtaining permission from the lecturer, observing students over two weeks, conducting interviews, and organizing the gathered data. The data were then analyzed descriptively by combining findings from both observation and interviews to identify specific cognitive factors and their underlying causes that affect students' speaking abilities in the classroom.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings
The study revealed that students faced several cognitive challenges in speaking English during classroom activities. These challenges were categorized into five major areas:

1. Vocabulary Issues

    Vocabulary problems were the most dominant, with 18 out of 20 students experiencing difficulties. These included forgetting words, limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulty expressing ideas, and trouble using academic vocabulary. Many students felt unprepared to respond spontaneously and relied on simpler words or improvisation.

2. Grammar Challenges

    A total of 17 students reported struggles with grammar, especially in using correct tenses and sentence structures. Their errors often affected sentence clarity and fluency. Some had difficulties with general grammar use, while others struggled with applying more formal or academic grammar in presentations.

3. Pronunciation Problems

    Eight students mentioned pronunciation as a barrier to effective speaking. The issues included lack of confidence in pronouncing complex or academic words and frequent pronunciation errors, even with common terms. These affected students' fluency and delivery during presentations.

4. Inhibition (Nervousness and Hesitation)

    Many students experienced nervousness, especially during public speaking or when being evaluated. This emotional stress led to hesitations, forgetting vocabulary, or avoiding participation. Some students managed this through deep breathing, preparation, and avoiding eye contact during presentations.

5. Mother Tongue Influence

Several students reported switching to Indonesian unconsciously when they struggled to find the right English word or felt nervous. This indicated a reliance on their first language due to gaps in vocabulary or confidence, which disrupted the flow of their English communication.

Discussions

The findings confirm that vocabulary limitations are a major barrier to fluent speaking in English. The inability to recall or apply the right words in real-time speech supports Chand's (2021) claim that vocabulary is a core component of cognitive processing in language. Without a strong vocabulary, students are more likely to hesitate, simplify, or avoid expressing complex ideas—limiting their communicative competence.

Grammar difficulties, particularly in applying tenses and sentence structures, further hinder students' fluency. The research supports Suharno's (2010) cognitive theory, which explains that speaking involves real-time processing of language rules. Students may understand grammar passively but struggle to apply it under pressure. This gap highlights the importance of grammar in practice, not just theory.

Pronunciation challenges—especially with academic or unfamiliar words—demonstrate how cognitive factors like memory and phonological awareness affect speaking. According to Mulasari (2015), accurate pronunciation is key to being understood. Students' fear of mispronouncing words often led to anxiety or avoidance, which decreased their willingness to speak.

Inhibition, although usually classified as an affective factor, showed strong cognitive interference. Students who felt nervous often forgot words or couldn't organize their thoughts. Hayes (2023) explains that anxiety can block cognitive processes such as memory recall and focus, supporting the idea that emotional pressure can negatively affect cognitive performance in language use.

Finally, the influence of the mother tongue indicates how students revert to their first language when their cognitive resources in English are insufficient. This confirms Chand's (2021) argument that L1 interference can disrupt fluency, especially in low-confidence or high-pressure situations. The findings suggest the need for immersive English practice and techniques that help reduce dependency on Bahasa Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that several cognitive factors significantly affect the English-speaking performance of third-semester students at Nusa Cendana University. The key factors identified include vocabulary limitations, grammar difficulties, pronunciation problems, inhibition (nervousness and hesitation), and mother tongue influence. Among these, vocabulary limitation was the most dominant issue, often preventing students from expressing their thoughts clearly.

Each of these cognitive challenges is closely linked to students' ability to process, recall, and apply language knowledge in real-time speaking situations. These issues lead to hesitation, loss of confidence, and reduced fluency. Despite these difficulties, students developed various coping strategies such as preparation, improvisation, simplification, and using online tools to support their learning. Addressing these cognitive factors through targeted support—such as structured vocabulary and grammar exercises, pronunciation practice, and confidence-building activities—can help students improve their speaking skills. The findings of this study are expected to be valuable for educators, curriculum designers, and institutions aiming to improve English language teaching and student performance.

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