

## **Developing Speaking Proficiency through Interview Projects: Insights from EFL Learner Experience and Classroom Practice**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the perceived impact of the Student Interview Project (SIP) as a pedagogical tool in enhancing students' speaking skill in a professional speaking class. Employing a mixed-methods approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews with 12 undergraduate students. The findings indicate that SIP significantly improves students' confidence, fluency, and linguistic competence, while reducing anxiety and shyness. The project also fostered authentic communication and active engagement. The study concludes that interview project activities offer a practical and motivational learning strategy for developing professional speaking abilities.

**Keywords:** *Interview project, speaking skills, pedagogical tools, EFL, student confidence*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Developing speaking proficiency is a fundamental objective in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in contexts where learners are expected to communicate effectively in professional and academic settings. Speaking not only serves as a tool for interaction but also reflects learners' linguistic competence and confidence (Derakhshan et al., 2016; Harmer, 2019). However, students in EFL classrooms often encounter multifaceted barriers when attempting to speak English. These include psychological obstacles such as anxiety, shyness, and low motivation, as well as linguistic limitations involving pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency (Fitriani et al., 2015; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Without addressing these interconnected challenges, it becomes difficult for learners to fully develop their communicative potential.

A growing body of research highlights the critical role of classroom pedagogy in overcoming these speaking challenges. Scholars have advocated for experiential learning approaches that replicate real-life communicative scenarios to promote learner engagement and spontaneous language use (David, 2010; Richards, 2006). Among such approaches, interview-based tasks are increasingly recognized for their effectiveness in fostering speaking fluency, confidence, and interactional competence (Hidayat & Ariani, 2023; Maca, 2020). The Student Interview Project (SIP), in particular, provides a structured yet flexible format in which students

formulate, practice, and present interviews. This framework allows for collaborative learning while encouraging students to articulate ideas in a meaningful context (Idham et al., 2024).

Several studies have explored the use of interview-based tasks to enhance students' speaking abilities in EFL contexts. For instance, Maca (2020) implemented pair and group interviews as a technique to improve speaking fluency, showing that students became more engaged and confident during practice. Similarly, Idham et al., (2024) found that structured interview tasks significantly boosted the speaking scores of Iraqi and Yemeni students, particularly in terms of vocabulary use and fluency. (Hasriani, (2019) investigated students' perceptions of interview techniques and noted increased self-awareness and participation despite initial hesitation. (Setyowati, 2019) emphasized that well-planned interview activities can also foster motivation and enthusiasm in speaking classes. These studies collectively demonstrate that interview activities can positively influence language output, classroom engagement, and learner autonomy.

Despite growing interest in interview-based learning, there remains a limited understanding of how structured interview projects function as pedagogical approach in professional speaking classes. Previous studies often emphasize the impact of interviews on fluency or motivation, yet few have thoroughly examined how these projects address both psychological and linguistic challenges simultaneously (Hasriani G, 2019; Setyowati, 2019). Moreover, research focusing on SIP as an integrated classroom intervention in EFL tertiary settings remains sparse. This gap underscores the need for a more comprehensive exploration of how SIP can support students holistically—enhancing their technical language performance while simultaneously building their communicative confidence.

To address this gap, the current study investigates the implementation and impact of the Student Interview Project in a professional speaking course offered to third-year English majors at Pattimura University. The project was introduced to provide students with practical opportunities to engage in semi-formal English communication. Through this study, we aim to assess how SIP supports students in overcoming psychological barriers (e.g., anxiety, shyness) and linguistic challenges (e.g., vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation). This study is guided by three central research questions: (1) How is the Student Interview Project implemented in the professional speaking class? (2) In what ways does the project assist students in addressing psychological and linguistic challenges in speaking? (3) What challenges do students encounter while participating in the project? These questions aim to produce a holistic understanding of the project's educational value and its limitations, thereby contributing to both practical pedagogy and academic discourse in EFL speaking instruction.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 1998; Plano Clark, 2019). The qualitative phase, conducted first, aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of students regarding the Student Interview Project (SIP) through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative phase followed, using questionnaire data to measure the impact of SIP on students' psychological and linguistic speaking factors. This design was chosen to allow the in-depth insights from the qualitative phase to inform the development and interpretation of quantitative results, thereby strengthening the validity of findings.

### **Course and Project Context**

This study was conducted in the context of the Professional Speaking course, a third-semester core subject offered in the English Education Study Program at Pattimura University. The course is designed to equip students with advanced oral communication skills suitable for academic, social, and professional contexts. Its intended learning outcomes include the ability to engage in structured discourse, conduct formal and informal interviews, deliver presentations, and use English fluently and accurately in real-world speaking situations.

The course adopts a project-based learning (PBL) approach, which emphasizes authentic, student-centered tasks as the primary method of instruction. Project-based learning has been widely recognized for fostering deeper engagement, improving communicative competence, and enhancing learner autonomy through collaborative, contextualized activities (Alan & Stoller, 2005; Ravitz, 2010). Within this framework, students are required to complete extended speaking tasks that integrate planning, research, rehearsal, peer collaboration, and final performance. The instructional model encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and develop critical soft skills such as time management, teamwork, and problem-solving.

The Student Interview Project (SIP) was implemented in three sequential phases: Planning, Project Work, and Presentation. During the planning phase, students selected topics, developed interview questions, and drafted scripts collaboratively in pair between interviewer and interviewee. In the project work phase, students conducted peer interviews, engaged in rehearsal sessions, and received formative feedback from both peers and the instructor. Finally, in the presentation phase, students recorded their interview performances using podcast or video formats and submitted them for assessment. The evaluation was based on a rubric assessing key speaking dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and delivery. The project was completed over four weeks and accounted for a significant portion of the students' final course grade.

The instructor's role throughout the project was that of a facilitator and language coach, providing scaffolding, clarification, modeling, and continuous feedback to support student progress. The SIP was designed not only to develop students' linguistic capabilities but also to reduce affective barriers such as speaking anxiety and to promote confidence through repeated, structured speaking practice. This context provided an ideal environment for investigating how interview-based tasks influence learners' speaking performance in an academic setting.

### **Participants**

The participants comprised 58 third-year students enrolled in a Professional Speaking course at Pattimura University's English Education Program during the 2023/2024 academic year. These students were selected using purposive sampling, as they were the only group implementing the SIP in their curriculum. According to Onwuegbuzie & Leech, (2015), purposive sampling is appropriate when participants possess specific knowledge or experiences relevant to the research topic. To explore individual differences in student experience, 12 students were selected for follow-up interviews based on diversity in their questionnaire scores related to speaking performance, ensuring a representative spread of high, moderate, and low performers.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

To ensure triangulation and robust data collection, three complementary instruments were used: observation, questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews.

- **Observation:** Classroom observations were conducted during three SIP implementation sessions. A structured observation guide, adapted from Budi Utomo (2017), focused on student engagement, participation, communication patterns, and lecturer feedback. Additional field notes captured contextual details, such as classroom dynamics and student behavior, to enrich understanding of the implementation process.
- **Questionnaire:** A 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire was developed to measure students' perceptions of changes in their psychological (confidence, anxiety, shyness, motivation) and linguistic (grammar, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary) speaking factors. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, and responses were collected anonymously to encourage honest feedback.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with 12 purposively selected students to gain deeper insight into their personal experiences with SIP. Each session followed a guiding protocol, covering topics such as speaking challenges, strategies for improvement, perceived benefits, and project-related feedback. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed for thematic analysis. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for probing follow-up questions while ensuring consistency across interviews (Darlington & Scott, 2020).

all research instruments were reviewed by two experts in English Language Teaching (ELT) and educational research. Items were evaluated based on their clarity, relevance, and

alignment with research objectives using the Content Validity Index (CVI) method (Polit & Beck, 2006). To enhance trustworthiness in the qualitative phase, the study employed triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from three different sources: observation, interviews, and questionnaire results. Peer debriefing sessions with fellow researchers helped challenge assumptions and refine coding schemes. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to participants for verification, ensuring accurate representation of their views.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through a pilot study conducted with 10 students from a similar academic background. Internal consistency reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.87$ , indicating high reliability.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase model proposed by Clarke & Braun, (2017): familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Transcripts and field notes were read iteratively, coded, and categorized into key themes related to the research questions. This process enabled the identification of recurring patterns and deeper interpretations of students' speaking experiences.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS v26, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. These statistics provided an overview of students' responses to each item and helped measure the general impact of SIP on the targeted psychological and linguistic variables. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings allowed for cross-validation and enhanced credibility of the conclusions drawn (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2015).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study on the implementation and impact of the Student Interview Project (SIP) in a professional speaking class are presented following a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach. Qualitative data from classroom observations and student interviews are triangulated with quantitative data from a questionnaire to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the SIP influenced students' speaking development. The findings are organized into three main themes: (1) the implementation of the interview project, (2) the psychological and linguistic outcomes experienced by students, and (3) the challenges students faced and their strategies to overcome them.

### **Implementation of the Interview Project**

Observation data collected over four classroom sessions revealed a progression in student behavior, engagement, and instructor interaction during the implementation of the Student Interview Project (SIP). The project was carried out in three phases: Planning, Project work,

and Presentation. Each phase showing distinct dynamics in how students responded to the tasks and how instructors supported their development.

During the Planning phase, students were observed to be tentative and uncertain. Several students hesitated to select interview topics and appeared unsure about how to structure their questions. Many relied on group discussions or waited for classmates to initiate ideas. One notable behavior was the frequent checking of draft scripts against instructor-provided examples, indicating a need for reassurance. The instructor played an active role during this phase by offering guided prompts, topic suggestions, and sample interview formats. Whiteboard brainstorming and real-time clarification were used to help students align their topics with the task goals. This heavy dependence on the instructor gradually decreased as the session progressed and students were paired, one as interviewer and the other one as interviewee, to discuss their topic, content and questions. In this particular session, students began to articulate more independent ideas.

The Project Work phase demonstrated a marked shift in classroom dynamics. Students became more actively engaged and collaborative. They practiced interview questions in pairs, rehearsed aloud, and asked clarifying questions related to vocabulary and pronunciation. Peer interaction increased noticeably; in several instances, students corrected one another's grammar and discussed appropriate expressions. One observation note captured a student saying, *"could try saying like this..... it sounds like we are having a conversation."* This kind of peer scaffolding signaled the emergence of learner autonomy and shared responsibility. The instructor moved between pairs, offering formative feedback, adjusting students' intonation, and prompting them to reformulate unclear expressions. The overall atmosphere during this phase was energetic and focused.

In the Presentation phase, students submitted their final interviews in podcast or video format. Observational reflections noted a significant improvement in confidence and fluency. During in-class preview sessions of the recordings, most students maintained clear articulation, used appropriate intonation, and followed structured interview formats. Students who were initially shy showed noticeable composure and engagement on video. Several chose to use gestures or add introductory phrases like, *"Welcome to our podcast today"*, reflecting increased professionalism. Instructor involvement at this stage centered on rubric-based evaluation and feedback delivery, focusing on aspects such as delivery clarity, speech pace, and audience engagement strategies. Overall, observation findings revealed that students transitioned from dependence to autonomy, hesitation to confidence, and scripted to spontaneous delivery throughout the SIP implementation. These findings confirm that the project's three-phase design successfully scaffolded speaking development by gradually



reducing cognitive load and providing consistent, contextualized support. Figure 1. Show the screenshot of an example of SIP video uploaded to YouTube channel by the participant.



Figure 1. An example of SIP video

### Psychological and Linguistic Outcomes

Quantitative data collected through a 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire indicated significant psychological and linguistic development among participants. Students reported notable improvements in confidence (72%), motivation (73%), and a reduction in anxiety and shyness. Linguistically, the SIP helped improve grammar awareness (67%), pronunciation (71%), vocabulary usage (69%), and fluency (68%). These results are visually presented in Figure 2, showcasing students' self-reported gains across the measured dimensions.

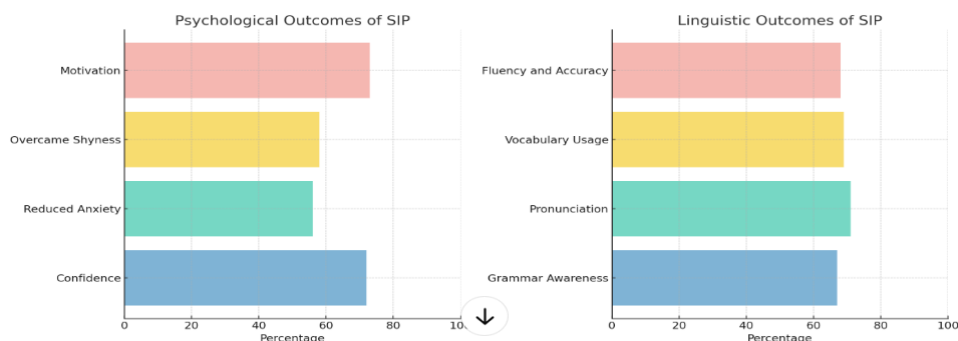


Figure 2. Students' self-report of Psychological and Linguistic Outcomes

### Challenges and Coping Strategies

Thematic analysis of interviews with 12 participants and observation notes identified four major categories of challenges: cognitive-linguistic, lexical, affective, and time management.

Students encountered initial difficulties in formulating questions, recalling vocabulary during spontaneous speech, managing anxiety, and balancing project work with other responsibilities. However, they developed effective coping strategies, including peer collaboration, rehearsal, self-monitoring, and emotional resilience. Table 1 presents these triangulated challenges. The triangulated data, drawn from classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, revealed four main categories of challenges students encountered during the Student Interview Project (SIP): cognitive-linguistic, lexical, affective, and time management. The data also demonstrated how students developed adaptive strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Table 1. A summary of Challenges and Coping Strategies

Challenge Category	Specific Challenges	Coping Strategies
Cognitive-Linguistic	Difficulty formulating grammatically correct or context-appropriate questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peer discussion</li><li>• Instructor modeling</li></ul>
Lexical	Limited vocabulary for spontaneous responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using dictionary, AI chatbot</li><li>• Peer assistance</li></ul>
Affective (Emotional)	Anxiety, shyness, fear of peer judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repeated rehearsal</li><li>• Peer encouragement</li></ul>
Time Management	Balancing SIP with coursework, rushed rehearsal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Task division</li><li>• Rehearsal scheduling</li></ul>

### **Cognitive-Linguistic Challenge: Difficulty in Formulating Questions**

Many students initially struggled with how to construct interview questions that were clear, grammatically accurate, and context-appropriate. This challenge reflects the cognitive complexity of speaking, which demands simultaneous attention to content and form. One student shared:

*"I knew the topic, but it was hard to make the right questions... sometimes I used Indonesian grammar in English." (S7)*

Observation data supported this, with students frequently seeking clarification from the instructor during script development. However, through repeated peer discussions and examples model provided in class, most learners began to understand how to formulate



questions more naturally in collaborating with their partner (interviewer and interviewee). The instructor's modeling of sample question types further supported this process. As one student reflected:

"After my partner showed me how she made her questions, I started to understand and fix mine. We helped each other." (S4)

This exchange highlights the importance of peer modeling and collaborative revision in helping students develop confidence and accuracy in language production.

### **Lexical Challenge: Limited Vocabulary for Spontaneous Interaction**

A common theme in student interviews was the limitation in vocabulary, which affected their ability to respond spontaneously during interview simulations. One student admitted:

*"I forgot some words when I answered. It made me stop and think too long."* (S3)

Observation confirmed this hesitation during early rehearsal sessions. To overcome this, students engaged in collaborative vocabulary building, often asking peers for synonyms, using AI chatbot and online dictionaries for preparation. Peer support was also instrumental in vocabulary expansion. As one student shared:

"If I didn't know a word, I asked my friend or searched it on my phone quickly before practice. We also made a list of useful words together." (S9)

These behaviors illustrate how students used both digital tools and peer collaboration to build lexical readiness — a form of strategic competence that supports spontaneous speaking.

### **Affective Challenge: Anxiety and Shyness in Early Stages**

Affective filters such as anxiety and shyness were major students inhibited in the initial planning and rehearsal stages. These factors significantly hindered students' participation in collaboration with their peer. Many students expressed nervousness when speaking in front of peers, especially during early recordings. One reflected:

*"I was afraid to make mistake and friends laugh. But the more I practiced, the more confident I felt."* (S10)

Observation logs supported these accounts, describing students avoiding eye contact and bowing their heads during early sessions. However, gradual exposure through low-stakes practice and repetition helped reduce these emotional filters. As rehearsals progressed, students became visibly more confident, particularly after positive peer and instructor feedback. This process of affective desensitization—where repeated, safe opportunities to

speak reduce anxiety—proved central to overcoming this challenge. As one student expressed:

"I practiced again and again with my friend. We laughed sometimes, but it helped me not to be so nervous when recording." (S6)

This quote illustrates how peer support, humor, and repeated rehearsal served as emotional buffers, enabling students to gradually face their fears and speak more freely.

### **Time Management Challenge: Script Preparation and Rehearsal**

Students also faced difficulty managing their time during the project, especially when balancing script preparation with other coursework. One participant explained:

*"Sometimes we finished script late because we had many assignments. We didn't have enough time to rehearse."* (S2)

Despite these pressures, students developed practical micro-strategies. These included setting self-imposed group deadlines, dividing responsibilities, and using short rehearsal blocks. As rehearsals advanced, more students adopted these habits to stay on track. As one student explained:

"We decided I would write the questions and my partner would find the vocabulary. That way we finished faster and could still practice." (S11)

This response reflects a clear shift toward self-regulation and peer-managed workload balancing, illustrating how the demands of the SIP encouraged time-management skill development alongside speaking proficiency.

## **DISCUSSION**

This section interprets and contextualizes the findings of the study on the implementation of the Student Interview Project (SIP) in a Professional Speaking class, aligning the results with the research questions and existing literature. The SIP, implemented through a project-based learning model, was found to significantly influence both the psychological and linguistic aspects of students' speaking skills. In addition, the project presented distinct challenges that students addressed through strategic and instructional support. The discussion is organized into three major themes: (1) the effectiveness of the SIP as a pedagogical tool, (2) its impact on psychological and linguistic development, and (3) the role of instructional design in overcoming challenges.

## **SIP as a Pedagogical Tool in Speaking Instruction**

The findings confirm that the Student Interview Project functioned effectively as a pedagogical tool to support speaking instruction. The three-phase implementation—planning, project work, and presentation—provided a clear scaffold that guided students from topic development to real-time communication. This aligns with Simpson, (2011), who emphasized that project-based instruction is essential when integrated into sequenced, communicative tasks. Students' increased participation, autonomy, and engagement observed during the SIP reflect the core principles of project-based learning, which focus on learner-centered, collaborative, and contextualized instruction (Alan & Stoller, 2005; Thomas, 2000).

Observation data showed that students gradually moved from dependence to independence in language production, demonstrating characteristics of effective task-based performance such as peer negotiation, rehearsal, and meaning-focused interaction (Richards, 2006). This suggests that SIP is not only feasible but also highly functional as a tool for professional speaking preparation, especially in EFL contexts where spontaneous speaking opportunities are limited.

## **Psychological and Linguistic Outcomes**

A significant outcome of the SIP was the improvement in both psychological and linguistic aspects of speaking. As reported in the questionnaire, 72% of students noted increased confidence, while 56% experienced reduced anxiety and 58% overcame shyness. This supports Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that reducing emotional barriers facilitates second language acquisition (Du, 2009). Furthermore, student interviews and observation data demonstrated reduced fear of judgment and increased comfort during recordings and rehearsals, confirming the importance of structured, repeated speaking opportunities in lowering affective filters (Mehmood, 2018).

Linguistically, gains were seen in grammar awareness, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. Students were observed to refine their speech through both peer and teacher feedback during the project work phase. These outcomes are consistent with Output Hypothesis (Pannell et al., 2017), which emphasizes that producing language in meaningful contexts pushes learners to develop syntactic and lexical competence. The SIP provided those opportunities in a motivating and realistic format, as students were required to apply formal and semi-formal speaking conventions relevant to professional environments.

## **Instructional Design and the Role of Scaffolding**

The SIP's success also relied on thoughtful instructional design and continuous scaffolding. The teacher's role as a facilitator—providing models, feedback, and rubrics—was essential in transitioning students from planning to performance. This aligns with sociocultural theory

(Lantolf, 2008), which argues that learners achieve higher outcomes when supported through guided interaction. Scaffolding in this study was visible in the planning phase (topic modeling), the project work phase (formative feedback), and the presentation phase (rubric-based evaluation), which ensured that students had consistent support throughout their learning journey.

Additionally, the use of a clear evaluation rubric helped students self-monitor their performance and understand assessment criteria. This practice not only increased performance transparency but also contributed to learner autonomy, one of the key goals of PBL (Guo et al., 2020).

### **Overcoming Challenges Through Collaborative Strategies**

Despite encountering challenges in vocabulary use, question formulation, time management, and speaking anxiety, students displayed resilience and problem-solving behavior. Peer collaboration emerged as a key strategy to overcome linguistic gaps, where students supported each other in pronunciation, grammar, and lexical selection. These collaborative behaviors confirm theory of communicative competence, particularly the component of strategic competence, which involves learners' ability to compensate for communication breakdowns (Lanka, 2017).

Moreover, time constraints were mitigated through student-devised scheduling, division of tasks, and rehearsal planning. Such strategies reflect emerging learner autonomy and demonstrate how real-world tasks can promote the development of both language and life skills. These findings mirror the work of Whanchit, (2017), who asserts that autonomy in language learning is fostered through responsibility-sharing and authentic tasks.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the implementation and impact of the Student Interview Project (SIP) as a pedagogical tool in assisting students' speaking skills within a Professional Speaking course that adopted a project-based learning framework. Drawing on a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, the findings demonstrate that the SIP contributed meaningfully to the development of both the psychological and linguistic dimensions of speaking among EFL students. Specifically, the project enhanced learners' confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, and improved pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and fluency. The structured three-phase model—planning, project work, and presentation—provided a clear learning trajectory that allowed students to move from guided preparation to semi-authentic performance. The integration of peer collaboration, instructor scaffolding, and real-world speaking tasks helped students overcome both affective and linguistic challenges. The findings confirm that interview-based projects, when properly scaffolded and integrated into professional speaking instruction, can foster learner autonomy, communicative competence, and classroom engagement.

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