

Students' perceptions of speaking English through zoom meeting online discussion platform

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Abstract

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in higher education has increasingly integrated synchronous video conferencing platforms, particularly for speaking skills instruction. Zoom has become one of the most widely used platforms due to its capacity to facilitate real-time verbal interaction in online classrooms. However, empirical evidence regarding students' perceptions of English-speaking practices through Zoom, especially in relation to social presence and speaking anxiety, remains limited. This study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of English-speaking practices in Zoom-based online discussions. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected from ten EFL students using a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire measured students' perceptions of speaking confidence, social presence, speaking anxiety, interaction, and the use of Zoom features during online speaking activities. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that students generally perceive Zoom as a supportive platform for developing speaking skills, particularly in enhancing confidence, interaction, and participation. Nevertheless, challenges related to speaking anxiety and technical issues persist.

Keywords: digital communication; EFL speaking; online discussion; perceptions; Zoom meeting

INTRODUCTION

Online learning has become an integral component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly in higher education contexts worldwide. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 significantly accelerated the global shift from conventional face-to-face instruction to online and blended learning environments, compelling educational institutions to rapidly adopt digital technologies to ensure instructional continuity (Dhawan, 2020; Whalen, 2020a). Although emergency remote teaching initially emerged as a crisis response, online learning has since evolved into a more permanent and strategic mode of instruction, reshaping pedagogical practices in language education beyond the pandemic era (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023).

In EFL contexts, online learning presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the development of communicative language skills. Speaking, as one of the most complex and anxiety-provoking language skills, requires meaningful interaction, immediate feedback, and a supportive learning environment (Al-Samiri, 2021). While online platforms offer flexibility and access to diverse learning resources, they also raise concerns regarding learners' engagement, interaction quality, and affective factors such as confidence and speaking anxiety (Putri & Suryaman, 2022). Consequently, the effectiveness of online EFL speaking instruction depends not only on technological availability but also on pedagogical design and learners' perceptions of the learning experience.

The integration of digital platforms into EFL instruction necessitates pedagogical adaptation to ensure meaningful and communicative learning experiences. Compton (2009) emphasizes that effective online language teaching requires teachers to develop competencies in technological, pedagogical, and evaluative domains. In line with this view, recent studies highlight that simply transferring traditional teaching methods to online environments may result in passive learning and limited interaction, particularly in speaking activities (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Therefore, online speaking instruction should be intentionally designed to promote interaction, collaboration, and learner participation.

Among various digital platforms, synchronous video conferencing tools have gained prominence in online EFL instruction. Platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet enable real-time communication, allowing teachers and students to interact synchronously through audio, video, and text-based features. Zoom has become one of the most widely used platforms in higher education due to its user-friendly interface and diverse interactive features, including breakout rooms, screen sharing, chat functions, and recording options (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). These features provide opportunities for authentic communication and collaborative learning, which are essential for developing speaking skills.

Previous research suggests that synchronous online platforms can support communicative language learning by facilitating multimodal interaction. (Hampel & Stickler, 2012) argue that videoconferencing environments enable learners to combine verbal, non-verbal, and textual communication, thus approximating face-to-face interaction. More recent studies confirm that synchronous platforms can enhance students' speaking opportunities, interaction patterns, and engagement when appropriately integrated into pedagogical design (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020a; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2023). In addition, virtual learning environments allow learners to engage in authentic language use beyond physical classroom constraints, fostering meaningful communication in diverse contexts (O'Dowd, 2018).

Despite these pedagogical affordances, online speaking instruction is not without challenges. One of the most frequently reported issues in online EFL learning is learners' speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety refers to feelings of tension, apprehension, or fear experienced when communicating in a second language, which may be exacerbated in online environments due to factors such as technological issues, fear of being recorded, limited non-verbal cues, and reduced sense of social connection (Horwitz et al., 1986). Recent studies indicate that while some learners feel more comfortable speaking online due to reduced physical presence, others experience heightened anxiety because of technical constraints and perceived evaluation by peers and instructors (Putri & Suryaman, 2022).

In this context, the concept of social presence becomes highly relevant. Social presence refers to the degree to which learners perceive others as "real" and emotionally connected in online learning environments (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020). A strong sense of social presence can foster trust, interaction, and learner engagement, which are critical for effective speaking practice. Studies conducted between 2020 and 2024 consistently report that social presence positively influences students' participation, motivation, and confidence in online language learning (Martin et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2024). Conversely, low social presence may lead to feelings of isolation, reduced interaction, and reluctance to speak.

Research in online EFL contexts has increasingly examined learners' perceptions of synchronous learning environments. Learners' perceptions play a crucial role in shaping their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). Positive perceptions of online platforms are associated with higher participation and willingness to communicate, while negative perceptions may hinder active involvement in speaking activities (Al-Samiri, 2021). Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of online speaking practices is essential for improving pedagogical strategies and learning design.

However, existing studies on online EFL learning tend to focus predominantly on technological readiness, general attitudes toward online learning, or overall learning satisfaction (Putri & Suryaman, 2022; Rahman et al., 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights into the feasibility of online instruction, they often overlook specific pedagogical practices related to speaking skills in synchronous environments. There remains a lack of empirical research examining how EFL students perceive English-speaking practices in structured Zoom-based discussions, especially in relation to speaking confidence, interaction, anxiety, and the pedagogical use of Zoom features.

In the Indonesian higher education context, this research gap is particularly evident. Although Indonesian universities have widely adopted Zoom and similar platforms for online instruction since the pandemic, empirical studies investigating students' speaking experiences in synchronous online discussions remain limited. Most local studies focus on challenges of online learning implementation, technological barriers, or general student satisfaction, rather than exploring learners' affective and interactional experiences in online speaking activities (Lestariningsih & Nababan, 2024; Putri & Suryaman, 2022). Given the importance of speaking skills for EFL learners' academic and professional development, further investigation into this area is warranted.

Moreover, the strategic use of Zoom features in online speaking instruction has not been sufficiently explored. Features such as breakout rooms, chat functions, and screen sharing offer pedagogical potential to support small-group discussions, reduce speaking anxiety, and encourage participation among less confident learners (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020b; Moorhouse et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these features largely depends on how they are perceived and experienced by students. Understanding students' perceptions can provide valuable insights into how these features can be optimized to create psychologically safe and interactive speaking environments.

Based on the considerations, this study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of English-speaking practices in Zoom-based online discussions using a descriptive quantitative approach. Specifically, the study examines students' perceptions regarding speaking confidence, social presence, speaking anxiety, interaction, and the use of Zoom features in online speaking activities. By focusing on students' perspectives, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on online EFL learning, particularly in synchronous virtual environments.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a descriptive quantitative approach to explore EFL students' perceptions of English speaking skills in Zoom-based online discussions. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain a systematic overview of students' perception trends based on their responses to statements presented in the questionnaire. This study focused on measuring students' perceptions of speaking confidence, social presence, speaking anxiety, interaction, and the use of Zoom features in online speaking learning.

Respondents

The respondents in this study were 10 students at a private university in Semarang, Indonesia. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, with the criterion that they had taken English conversation classes conducted via Zoom. All participants participated voluntarily and had received an explanation of the research objectives before completing the questionnaire.

Instruments

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 24 Likert-scale items, adapted and validated by the supervisor. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items were grouped into six dimensions: confidence and feelings during speaking, perceived effectiveness of the session, challenges encountered, interaction and engagement, usefulness of Zoom features, and perceived improvement and future goals. The instrument was reviewed through expert judgment and achieved a validation score indicating that it was suitable for use without major revisions.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted after students participated in several English language learning sessions via Zoom, which involved group discussions, presentations, and interactions between lecturers and students. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms, and

participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire independently based on their learning experiences. All responses were collected anonymously to maintain participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis included calculating the mean value for each aspect of perception to describe the trends in students' responses to Zoom-based speaking learning. The results of the analysis were then interpreted to provide an overview of student perceptions and discussed in relation to previous research findings and relevant theoretical frameworks.

FINDING AND DISUCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study regarding EFL students' perceptions of English-speaking practices in Zoom-based online discussions. The discussion integrates descriptive statistical results with relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical findings from previous studies published between 2020 and 2025. The results are organized according to the key dimensions investigated in this study, namely students' confidence and emotional responses, perceived effectiveness of Zoom-based speaking activities, challenges encountered, interaction and engagement, use of Zoom features, and perceived improvement and future speaking goals.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Speaking English through Zoom-Based Online Discussions

No	Dimensions	Mean	Category
1	Students' Confidence and Feelings in Speaking English through Zoom	4.10	High
2	Perceived Effectiveness of Zoom-Based Speaking Sessions	4.05	High
3	Challenges Faced by Students in Zoom-Based Speaking Activities	3.20	Moderate
4	Students' Interaction and Engagement in Online Speaking Discussions	4.15	High
5	Usefulness of Zoom Features in Supporting Speaking Activities	4.30	High
6	Perceived Improvement and Future Speaking Goals	4.25	High

Overall Students' Perceptions of Zoom-Based Speaking Activities

The overall findings indicate that EFL students generally hold positive perceptions of Zoom-based speaking activities across most measured dimensions. As presented in Table 1, five out of six dimensions fall within the high category, with mean scores ranging from 4.05 to 4.30. Only the dimension related to challenges faced by students in Zoom-based speaking activities is categorized as moderate (M = 3.20). This pattern suggests that students perceive Zoom not merely as a technological medium, but as a meaningful learning space that supports English-speaking development in higher education contexts.

The highest mean score was recorded for the usefulness of Zoom features in supporting speaking activities (M = 4.30), followed closely by perceived improvement and future speaking goals (M = 4.25) and interaction and engagement (M = 4.15). These findings indicate that students strongly recognize the pedagogical value of Zoom's interactive features and their contribution to active participation and speaking development. Such results align with previous studies emphasizing that well-designed synchronous online learning environments can enhance student engagement, interaction, and communicative competence (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020b; Moorhouse et al., 2021).

At the same time, the moderate level of perceived challenges suggests that while Zoom-based speaking instruction is generally effective, technical and psychological barriers remain relevant. This balanced pattern reflects findings from earlier research showing that online speaking environments often involve both pedagogical benefits and practical constraints (Mohammadi, 2024; Putri & Suryaman, 2022) Overall, the descriptive results indicate that Zoom-based speaking activities are

positively received by EFL students, yet their effectiveness depends on careful pedagogical design and institutional support.

Students' Confidence and Emotional Responses in Speaking English through Zoom

The first dimension examined students' confidence and emotional responses when speaking English through Zoom-based discussions. As shown in Table 1, this dimension achieved a high mean score ($M = 4.10$), indicating that students generally feel confident and emotionally comfortable when participating in online speaking activities. Responses to questionnaire items such as *"I felt confident speaking English during today's Zoom session"* and *"I felt comfortable turning on my microphone and speaking during discussions"* were predominantly rated in the *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* categories.

These findings suggest that Zoom-based speaking activities may reduce certain affective barriers commonly associated with face-to-face speaking tasks. Previous studies have reported that online environments can lower students' anxiety by providing a sense of psychological distance and allowing learners more time to prepare their responses (Al-Samiri, 2021; Putri & Suryaman, 2022). In synchronous online settings, students may feel less exposed to immediate peer judgment compared to traditional classrooms, which can positively influence their speaking confidence.

However, despite the overall positive perceptions, some students still reported feelings of nervousness, particularly in response to the item *"I felt nervous because I had to speak while being visible on camera."* This finding indicates that the visual dimension of Zoom, while enhancing interaction, can also trigger self-consciousness and anxiety. Similar findings have been reported by (Horwitz et al., 1986) who found that camera use in online speaking classes may increase anxiety for learners who are not accustomed to being visually present during oral performance.

These results highlight the dual role of synchronous video-based instruction in shaping students' emotional experiences. While Zoom can support confidence building, it can also introduce new forms of anxiety related to visibility and self-presentation. Therefore, pedagogical strategies such as optional camera use, gradual exposure to speaking tasks, and supportive feedback are essential to create a psychologically safe learning environment (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020).

Perceived Effectiveness of Zoom-Based Speaking Activities

The second-dimension concerns students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Zoom-based speaking activities. With a high mean score ($M = 4.05$), students generally perceive Zoom as an effective platform for practicing English speaking skills. This perception is supported by positive responses to statements such as *"The speaking activities in today's Zoom session helped me improve my English"* and *"I think Zoom is an effective platform for practicing English speaking."*

The perceived effectiveness of Zoom-based discussions can be attributed to the synchronous nature of the platform, which enables real-time interaction and immediate feedback. Synchronous online learning environments have been shown to support the development of speaking fluency and communicative competence when pedagogically designed to promote interaction (Elfirdoussi et al., 2020; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020a; Yates et al., 2021). The ability to engage in live discussions, ask questions, and respond spontaneously allows students to practice authentic communication, which is essential for speaking development.

Moreover, students' agreement with statements related to expressing ideas clearly during Zoom discussions indicates that online speaking activities can support cognitive engagement and meaning making. This finding supports (O'Dowd, 2018) argument that virtual learning environments can provide authentic opportunities for meaningful language use beyond physical classroom constraints. When students perceive online speaking tasks as effective, they are more likely to engage actively and invest effort in the learning process (Martin et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, perceived effectiveness is closely linked to instructional design. Without structured tasks, clear instructions, and supportive feedback, synchronous platforms may fail to

facilitate meaningful speaking practice (Compton, 2009; Moorhouse et al., 2021). Therefore, the high effectiveness ratings in this study suggest that the Zoom-based speaking activities were sufficiently structured to support students' communicative development.

Challenges Encountered in Zoom-Based Speaking Activities

Despite the overall positive perceptions, students reported a moderate level of challenges ($M = 3.20$) related to Zoom-based speaking activities. These challenges primarily involve technical and psychological factors, as indicated by responses to items such as *"I experienced technical problems (internet, audio, etc.) that affected my ability to speak"* and *"I found it difficult to follow the discussion due to connection or audio issues."*

Technical challenges remain one of the most frequently cited obstacles in online language learning, particularly in contexts where internet stability and digital infrastructure vary among students (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Whalen, 2020b). Unstable connections, audio delays, and device limitations can disrupt interaction flow, reduce speaking opportunities, and increase cognitive load. These disruptions may lead to frustration and reduced participation, especially during speaking tasks that require sustained attention and turn-taking.

In addition to technical issues, psychological challenges such as speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes were also reported. The item *"I felt nervous because I had to speak while being visible on camera"* reflects the emotional dimension of online speaking challenges. These findings are consistent with (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021) who emphasize that technological and affective factors are closely intertwined in shaping students' online learning experiences.

The moderate level of challenges suggests that while these issues do not dominate students' perceptions, they remain significant enough to influence learning quality. Addressing these challenges requires both institutional support, such as reliable technological infrastructure, and pedagogical interventions, such as anxiety-reducing strategies and flexible participation options (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020).

Students' Interaction and Engagement in Zoom-Based Speaking Discussions

Interaction and engagement emerged as one of the strongest dimensions in this study, with a high mean score ($M = 4.15$). Students reported active participation in Zoom-based speaking discussions and perceived meaningful interaction with peers. Responses to items such as *"The breakout room activities encouraged me to speak more"* and *"I actively engaged with my classmates during the Zoom speaking activities"* indicate that interactive task design plays a crucial role in promoting engagement.

These findings support previous research highlighting the importance of interaction in online language learning. (Martin & Bolliger, 2018) emphasize that student engagement is a key determinant of successful online education, while (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020) argue that interaction contributes to the development of social presence. In synchronous speaking activities, interaction allows students to negotiate meaning, practice turn-taking, and receive feedback, all of which are essential for speaking development.

The high level of engagement reported in this study suggests that Zoom's interactive features were effectively utilized to facilitate communication. Breakout rooms provide smaller and less intimidating spaces for speaking practice, which can encourage participation among less confident learners ((Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020b; Moorhouse et al., 2021). This aligns with findings by (Yates et al., 2021)), who reported that small-group discussions in synchronous online environments enhance student engagement and speaking opportunities.

Usefulness of Zoom Features in Supporting Speaking Activities

The highest mean score in this study was recorded for the usefulness of Zoom features ($M = 4.30$), indicating that students strongly perceive Zoom's technological affordances as supportive of their

speaking practice. Students agreed that features such as breakout rooms, chat functions, and audio-video tools enhanced their understanding and participation in discussions.

The chat feature, for example, allows students to clarify ideas, ask questions, and support their oral responses, which can reduce cognitive load and anxiety (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Similarly, breakout rooms create opportunities for collaborative speaking practice in a less formal setting, fostering interaction and social presence (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). These findings confirm that technology itself does not guarantee effective learning; rather, its pedagogical use determines its impact. When Zoom features are strategically integrated into speaking activities, they can transform online classrooms into interactive and socially meaningful learning environments (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2020; Moorhouse et al., 2021).

Perceived Improvement and Future Speaking Goals

The final dimension examined students' perceptions of improvement and future speaking goals, which also achieved a high mean score ($M = 4.25$). Students expressed confidence that their speaking skills had improved through Zoom-based discussions and showed strong motivation for continued participation in future online speaking activities. Agreement with statements such as *"I believe consistent Zoom discussions will help me improve my English-speaking skills"* indicates a positive learning orientation.

These findings suggest that Zoom-based speaking instruction not only influences immediate performance but also shapes students' long-term motivation and goal setting. According to (Martin et al., 2020), positive learning experiences in online environments can enhance learners' self-efficacy and willingness to engage in future learning tasks. In the context of EFL speaking, sustained motivation is essential for continuous practice and skill development.

Theoretically, this study contributes to EFL and online learning literature by deepening the understanding of social presence and speaking anxiety in Zoom-mediated speaking instruction. Pedagogically, the findings are expected to inform EFL instructors about the importance of designing interactive and psychologically safe online speaking activities. Practically, the study offers insights into how Zoom features can be strategically utilized to support more meaningful, inclusive, and effective speaking practices in virtual EFL classrooms, particularly in higher education contexts in Indonesia.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that EFL students generally perceive Zoom-based speaking activities positively across dimensions of confidence, effectiveness, interaction, engagement, and perceived improvement. While technical and psychological challenges persist at a moderate level, they do not overshadow the overall benefits of synchronous online speaking instruction. These results reinforce the view that Zoom-based learning environments can function as pedagogically valuable spaces for developing communicative competence when supported by appropriate instructional design and technological infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This study explored EFL students' perceptions of English-speaking practices in Zoom-based online discussions in a higher education context. Drawing on a descriptive quantitative approach, the findings reveal that students generally perceive Zoom as a supportive and pedagogically valuable platform for developing English-speaking skills. Overall, students reported positive perceptions across key dimensions, including speaking confidence, interaction and engagement, perceived effectiveness of online speaking activities, the usefulness of Zoom features, and perceived improvement with future speaking goals. These findings indicate that synchronous online platforms, when pedagogically designed, can facilitate meaningful speaking practices in virtual EFL classrooms. Students perceive Zoom-based speaking activities as contributing not only to immediate speaking performance but also to their long-term learning orientation. Students expressed strong motivation to continue participating in online speaking discussions and believed that consistent engagement in

such activities would improve their English-speaking skills. This positive learning orientation indicates that well-designed online speaking instruction can foster sustained motivation and self-efficacy among EFL learners. Despite the overall positive perceptions, this study highlights that technical and psychological challenges remain relevant in Zoom-based speaking activities. Issues related to internet stability, audio quality, and technological access were perceived at a moderate level, indicating that these factors can still disrupt interaction and increase anxiety. To maximize these benefits, educators should prioritize pedagogical designs that promote psychological safety, meaningful interaction, and inclusive participation, while institutions should ensure reliable technological support. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, mixed methods design, and longitudinal approaches to further examine how synchronous online speaking practices influence learners' communicative competence over time.

AUTHOR STATEMENT

The authors declare that this manuscript is original, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The authors confirm that this research was conducted ethically, and that all data were collected and analysed honestly. There is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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