First language interference on EFL learners' speaking abilty at the higher education level

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Article Info

Abstract

This research examines the influence of first language (L1) interference on the speaking ability of Indonesian EFL learners at the higher education level, focusing on English Education students. Using a mixed method approach, data were gathered through questionnaires (closed-ended and open-ended) and semi-structured interviews with intermediate-level learners in English. The findings identify two dominant forms of L1 interference: grammatical and phonological. Grammatical interference involves the transfer of Indonesian sentence structures and tense usage into English, while phonological interference appears in the mispronunciation of unfamiliar English sounds. Four key factors contribute to this interference: linguistic background, proficiency level, psychological barriers, and learning strategies. The interference significantly hinders both accuracy and fluency, often due to mental translation habits, lack of confidence, and overreliance on grammar-based instruction. The study concludes that L1 interference is a complex issue requiring communicative, confidence-oriented teaching methods and greater exposure to authentic English use. This insight offers practical implications such as the implementation of short lessons that give EFL students space to study or practice without pressure so that they can improve their English as a foreign language skill.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly globalized world, English plays a central role not only as a means of international communication but also as a key skill for academic, professional, and social mobility. In many aspects of modern life, English proficiency opens access to knowledge resources, global networks, and broader career opportunities (Azizi, 2024). As a global lingua franca, English bridges speakers from various linguistic backgrounds, facilitating cross-cultural interaction and more effective transnational collaboration. It has become a vital tool not only for accessing global information but also for actively participating in international discourse and negotiations.

In Indonesia, the importance of mastering English is reflected in Article 33 (1) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation (Permendikbudristek) No. 12 of 2024, which mandates English instruction from elementary to high school. This policy demonstrates the government's commitment to equipping students with linguistic competence to compete at the global level. Beyond being a body of knowledge, English is taught as a life skill and is increasingly being used as a medium of instruction in several higher education programs.

However, despite its importance, implementing this policy faces several challenges. Although English is part of the formal curriculum, most Indonesian students still struggle to achieve proficiency especially in speaking, which demands fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Many can perform well in reading and grammar but experience anxiety and hesitation during real-time speaking.

The difficulty in mastering speaking skills essentially reflects the complexity of language systems. As a symbolic communication system that conveys not only factual information but also emotional, social, and cultural meanings (Fromkin et al., 2018) This complexity arises from various linguistic aspects including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Fromkin et al., 2017). Each component has its own unique rules and structures, which often differ significantly from one language to another. In second language learning, these differences often become a source of difficulty, especially when learners unconsciously transfer structures from their L1 into the target language. Such transfer can be beneficial when languages share similar features, but more often, it results in errors known as negative transfer.

This phenomenon is known as L1 interference or L1 interference, also referred to as negative transfer in applied linguistics. It occurs when the structures or habits of the first language are carried over into the second language, leading to errors in pronunciation, grammar, or meaning. Ellis (1994) explains that interference is one of the most common causes of errors in second language or foreign language acquisition, particularly in the early stages of learning, though it may persist into advanced levels if not properly addressed. L1 interference is not merely a technical issue; it reflects deeper cognitive and affective challenges faced by learners during the language acquisition process.

In Indonesia, L1 interference is very common in English learning due to the striking structural differences between Indonesian language and English. Grammatically, Indonesian language does not have verb inflections to indicate tense, does not change verbs according to the subject, and does not require auxiliary verbs. In contrast, English relies heavily on these features. As a result, Indonesian learners tend to make mistakes such as omitting to be, misusing tenses, or constructing sentences in a pattern that reflects their L1. Phonologically, many English sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, or /v/ do not exist in Indonesian language, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation. For example, the /θ/ sound in "think" is often replaced with /t/ or /s/, resulting in "tink" or "sink."

This creates a barrier in oral communication because it can affect the listener's understanding and perception of the speaker's clarity. Mispronunciation can reduce clarity and lead to misunderstandings, which ultimately discourages learners from speaking further. Lexically and semantically, students frequently involve themselves in literal translation from Indonesian language to English without considering idiomatic or contextual differences. For example, the expression "I am already eat" is a direct translation of *"Saya sudah makan,"* reflecting L1 transfer that violates English grammatical rules. Learners may also choose words that are technically correct but semantically inappropriate in the given context, leading to awkward or unnatural expressions. If left uncorrected, such errors can hinder the overall development of speaking competence and reduce learners' confidence.

Due to L1 interference, English proficiency in Indonesia remains relatively low (Munandar, 2023). According to EF English Proficiency Index 2024 ranked Indonesia 80th out of 113 countries surveyed, far below other ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. One major cause of this low ranking is the limited context in which English is used in

Indonesia. Unlike countries like the Philippines or Malaysia, where English holds second language status and is used in daily life, in Indonesia English is taught only as a foreign language (EFL). This means that students are exposed to English primarily in classroom settings, with minimal authentic usage outside of formal education. This limited exposure leads to minimal language input and almost no meaningful interaction in English, both of which are crucial for the development of communicative competence.

This limited exposure has a direct impact on speaking skills. According to (Hassanzadeh & Vahdany, 2014) speaking ability is strongly influenced by both the quality and quantity of language input and the opportunities to practice. In EFL contexts, learners often have few chances to use English in real-life communication, which slows down internalization and leads to ongoing challenges. Even among English Education students who are expected to have more intensive exposure there are still many who struggle to produce accurate and fluent spoken English. Speaking remains the least practiced and most anxiety-inducing skill among many university learners.

This situation raises critical questions about the effectiveness of current English teaching methods. Are the curricula and teaching strategies being implemented sufficient to facilitate the functional development of speaking skills? Do current approaches accommodate learners' L1 backgrounds and the tendency toward interference? The fact that advanced students still produce utterances with grammatical errors, pronunciation mistakes, and sentence patterns resembling Indonesian language reveals a gap between formal instruction and actual communicative competence. This issue highlights the need to revisit pedagogical practices and emphasize speaking-focused interventions, particularly those that address L1 transfer issues.

Previous studies have explored the influence of the L1 on writing (Budiharto, 2019) and syntactic errors in speaking (Syafutri & Saputra, 2021). However, very few have specifically examined how L1 interference affects fluency and accuracy in speaking, particularly among prospective English teachers. Fluent and accurate speaking ability is a core competency for language educators, both in classroom teaching and as language role models for their students. The lack of studies focusing on these future educators is concerning, considering that their speaking performance will directly influence their future learners.

Furthermore, most prior research has focused mainly on identifying linguistic errors (error analysis) without investigating psychological factors such as foreign language anxiety, self-efficacy, or performance pressure experienced by students when using English in academic contexts. Additionally, there is a lack of systematic studies evaluating pedagogical strategies or classroom interventions aimed at addressing L1 interference. This research gap is the basis for the urgency of the present study. Addressing this gap can help educators better understand not only the kinds of errors learners make but also why those errors persist and how to address them effectively through teaching practices.

First-language interference is the primary factor hindering EFL learners' mastery of English. This interference still frequently occurs among EFL learners at the university level who are majoring in English Education, even after receiving intensive English instruction, meaning they still often make mistakes when speaking English. This issue raises several questions that form the basis of this study, which are: What types of L1 interference affect EFL students' speaking ability? What are the contributing factors that influence the L1 interference? What are the impacts of L1 interference on EFL students' speaking ability?

The objectives of this study are to find out the types of first language interference that affect EFL students' English-speaking skills and to analyses the influence of first language interference (Indonesian language) on the English-speaking ability of EFL learners at the higher education level so that the findings can serve as reference material for developing effective English as a foreign language teaching methodology.

This research significantly contributes to language learning theories by examining how L1 interference affects the English-speaking skills of EFL learners at the higher education level. It enriches the understanding of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Error Analysis (EA), and the Adaptive Control Hypothesis (Green, 2018), offering insights into how differences between Indonesian and English impact oral production. The study also supports the development of more effective teaching methods in EFL contexts with limited English exposure by analyzing L1 interference in depth, thus making a valuable contribution to foreign language instruction.

METHODS

Research Design
This study used a mixed-method approach to explore the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners regarding the influence of their first language (L1), especially in speaking skills. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to give the researcher both a general overview from a group of participants and a deeper understanding of their personal experiences. The quantitative method was used to gather generalizable data on the types and effects of L1 interference, while the qualitative method explored more detailed insights into learners' perceptions, challenges, and contributing factors.

Respondents
The participants of this study were 33 students from the English Education study program at a public university in Central Java, Indonesia. All participants were native Indonesian speakers and had an intermediate level of English proficiency, with EnglishScore or TOEFL-equivalent scores above 400. These students were selected because they are future English teachers, making their understanding of L1 influence important for their academic and professional development. For privacy, personal identities of the participants were not disclosed in the research results.

Instruments
Data were collected using two main instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire included both open-ended and close-ended questions and was distributed online via Google Forms. Open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their personal experiences with L1 interference, especially in grammar. They were also asked to explain contributing factors such as psychological pressure, confidence levels, and current English proficiency. The close-ended questions were presented in a 4-point Likert scale format to measure how often and how strongly L1 affected their pronunciation and fluency in speaking.

To support the data from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, selected purposively from the same group. These interviews explored deeper issues such as fluency problems, lack of confidence, and strategies used to reduce L1 influence. Questions also addressed how familiar the participants were with Indonesian language structures and how these affected their English production.

The instruments used in this study were developed based on relevant literature and adapted to the context of EFL learners in Indonesia. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: (1) close-ended statements, for example, "I often use Indonesian grammar when speaking English," and (2) open-ended questions such as "What difficulties do you face when speaking English?" To complement the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide was also prepared, covering similar topics to explore participants' experiences in more depth. Both instruments were piloted beforehand to ensure their clarity and alignment with the research focus.

Data collection procedures
Data were collected in two stages. The first stage involved distributing the questionnaire to 33 participants. After analyzing initial patterns, six participants were selected for follow-up interviews. These interviews were conducted online and recorded with the participants' permission for further analysis.

Data analysis
Data were analyzed in two ways, depending on the type of data. The quantitative data from the close-ended questions were analyzed descriptively, using percentages and frequencies to identify common patterns of L1 interference and its possible causes. Meanwhile, qualitative data from open-ended responses and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically. The researcher identified key themes such as grammatical and phonological interference, learning challenges, psychological barriers, and coping strategies. These themes were then connected to the main research focus.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
This study investigates the persistent influence of first language (L1) interference among advanced EFL learners. The results reveal three main themes: types of L1 interference, its impact on speaking ability, and the contributing factors.

Types of L1 Interference Experienced by Higher-Level EFL Learners

This study revealed that L1 interference is still frequently found among English Education students at the university level, even though they have received extensive English instruction. Two primary types of L1 interference were identified: grammatical interference and phonological interference.

Grammatical Interference

Grammatical interference refers to the application of Indonesian grammatical structures when speaking English. This form of interference was frequently reported by participants:
Applying Indonesian word order when speaking English:

"I make grammar mistakes because I am still influenced by the Indonesian language. For example, a mistake I still often make is when I want to say 'saya sangat suka' (I really like it), I end up translating it as 'I very like it.' It should be 'I really like it.'" (Q8)

Incorrect use of tense because of different grammar rules:

"The grammar mistake I still make is in the use of tenses, especially the perfect tense." (Q11)

Errors caused by differences in verb usage rules:

"I make grammar mistakes because I still use Indonesian as my everyday language. For example, I make mistakes in using '-s and -es' in verbs." (Q21)

Many EFL learners tend to directly apply Indonesian grammatical structures when speaking English, such as keeping the word order used in Indonesian or omitting tense markers. This happens because of negative transfer, which occurs when there are structural differences between the L1 and English, especially when learners have not yet mastered English grammar rules automatically (Ellis, 1994). Therefore, even though they may understand English grammar in theory, many EFL learners still struggle to apply it correctly in real speaking situations.

One of the main challenges for learners is the lack of verb tenses in Indonesian. Unlike English, which requires the use of various tenses, Indonesian expresses time without changing the verb form. As a result, learners often struggle to produce correct grammatical structures such as the present perfect tense or the use of the third-person singular pronoun "-s." They also tend to misuse verb forms because verbs in Indonesian are not conjugated based on subject or tense. These repeated errors are clear signs of L1 interference.

These findings show that many EFL learners still rely on Indonesian grammatical structures when speaking English. This typically occurs because Indonesian does not use tenses or verb inflections, leading students to omit necessary grammatical elements in English. Learners often apply familiar sentence patterns from their L1, resulting in errors such as incorrect word order or missing auxiliary verbs. These repeated mistakes suggest that students need more focused grammar instruction and speaking practice to internalize correct English structures naturally.

The recurring grammatical difficulties shown by participants highlight the impact of negative transfer from Indonesian. This suggests the need for targeted grammar instruction that contrasts Indonesian and English structures and encourages regular speaking practice to help learners internalize correct forms more automatically.

Phonological Interference

Phonological interference was observed through mispronunciations influenced by Indonesian sound systems. Several respondents reported difficulty pronouncing certain English sounds. As a result, they tend to replace unfamiliar sounds with ones that are more familiar and easier to pronounce. They also applied Indonesian phonological patterns, especially in stressing syllables. This aligns with what R2 and R4 from semi-structured interviews that stated:
Phonological interference due to overgeneralization of English spelling rules:

"In pronunciation, I often mispronounce words like 'prejudice' or 'determine' because I tend to generalize based on the spelling. I don't realize that the pronunciation of the last syllable can be completely different." (R2)

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Phonological interference caused by similarity between English and Indonesian lexicon:

"I make mistakes in pronunciation, for example, with words that resemble Indonesian ones. For instance, the word 'focus.' I get confused about how to pronounce it correctly because I'm still influenced by the Indonesian word 'fokus." (R4)

EFL learners often generalize English spelling based on Indonesian phonology, leading to common mispronunciations of unfamiliar sounds. In many cases, certain English sounds do not exist in the Indonesian language. As a result, learners often generalize pronunciations based on what is familiar to them or substitute the English sounds with similar-sounding Indonesian equivalents. Moreover, questionnaire data revealed that the English sounds /θ/, /ð/, and /ʒ/ were the most challenging for the learners to pronounce. This is illustrated in the following figure:
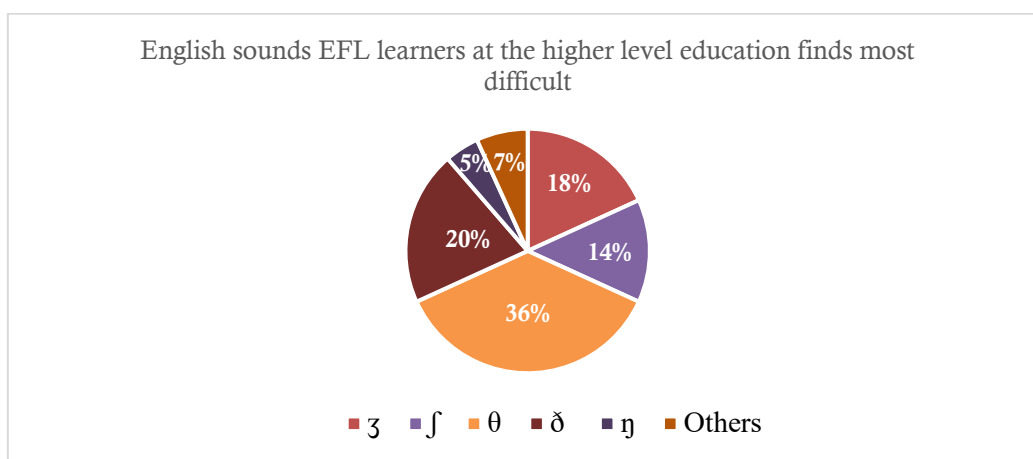

Figure 1: The most difficult English words to pronounce by EFL learners at the higher level

According to the chart, the English sound most difficult for higher education EFL learners is /θ/ as in think (36%), followed by /ŋ/ (sing, 20%), /ʒ/ (measure, 18%), /ʃ/ (she, 14%), /ð/ (this, 7%), and other sounds (5%). These phonemes are not present in the Indonesian sound system, making them prone to substitution.

Phonological interference is primarily influenced by learners' L1, causing unfamiliar English sounds to be replaced with familiar Indonesian equivalents. Participants R2 and R4, for instance, reported mispronouncing words like *prejudice, determine, and focus* based on Indonesian spelling or phonology. This reflects a broader pattern where EFL learners rely on L1 rules when English sounds are not easily mapped to their native inventory. These findings support Suciati & Diyanti (2021) which highlight that such errors are systematic. Differences in stress, rhythm, and unfamiliar consonants lead to mispronunciations.

This study reveals that pronunciation problems at the tertiary level are not minor errors, but rather systematic issues rooted in the influence of the L1. If not addressed seriously, these issues can hinder intelligibility and reduce learners' confidence in speaking. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors provide structured and explicit phonetic and phonological training, including clear explanations of the differences between the Indonesian and English sound systems. Furthermore, providing immediate feedback is crucial so that EFL learners can quickly recognize their errors and correct them as quickly as possible.

L1 Interference Impact on EFL Learners' Speaking Ability

The data from questionnaires and interviews revealed that L1 interference negatively affects both the accuracy and fluency of EFL learners when speaking English. Inaccuracy and disfluency occur due to grammatical and phonological interference from the L1.

Accuracy

Language accuracy plays a crucial role in effective communication, with grammar mastery being a key contributing factor. According to Ellis & Sheen (2006), accuracy is one of the main factors in

language development. EFL learners often make grammatical errors due to a limited understanding of the rules of the target language, which leads to the formation of an interlanguage system. The table below indicates EFL learners' perceptions of their own English accuracy.

Table 1: EFL students' responses of L1 interference in English speaking

No.	Statement	Frequency (%)					Mean
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
1.	I can pronounce English words correctly.	18.18	42.42	39.39		-	4.00
2	People understand my English clearly.	9.09	63.64	24.24	3.03	-	3.79
3.	I still often use Indonesian layout patterns when speaking English.	6.06	48.48	21.21	18.18	6.06	3.18
4.	I still often mix Indonesian grammar when I speak English.	18.18	45.45	21.21	18.18	-	3.45
5.	I still often mix Indonesian words when I speak English.	21.21	57.58	12.12	9.09	-	3.91
Average Mean							**3.67**

The Likert scale results indicate that L1 interference continues to significantly impact EFL learners' speaking accuracy, particularly in grammar and pronunciation. Statements 4 and 5 showed high mean scores (3.45 and 3.91, respectively), reflecting the persistent influence of grammatical and lexical interference.

Although most respondents responded positively to statement 1, indicating confidence in their ability to pronounce English words correctly (mean = 4.00), doubts about their phonological accuracy persisted. This is evident in statement 2, which had a slightly lower mean score of 3.79. While relatively high, this indicates that some students still experience unclear communication, indicating a vulnerability to miscommunication.

In contrast, the lowest average score was found for statement 3 (3.18), indicating that Indonesian sentence structures (layout patterns) are still frequently used when speaking English.

Overall, the average score of 3.67 reflects that L1 interference on EFL learners' speaking accuracy remains at a moderate to high level. This finding reinforces the notion that L1 remains a major barrier to achieving speaking accuracy for university-level EFL learners. Grammar, pronunciation, and word choice errors caused by L1 influence reduce their communication effectiveness.

Therefore, pedagogical interventions should be implemented carefully and systematically, focusing on developing linguistic automation, such as through contextual speaking practice, contrastive phonology training, and integration of real-life communication tasks to reduce L1 influence and improve EFL learners' speaking accuracy at the tertiary level.

Fluency

Fluency is still often disrupted when learners habitually translate from Indonesian before speaking in English. Many participants reported that they mentally translated Indonesian language into English first, which led to frequent pauses, repetitions, and even forgetting what they wanted to say. This process slows down speech production and reduces clarity.

Levelt (1989) emphasized that fluency depends on mental automatization; when learners still consciously translate from L1, the increased cognitive load hinders smooth communication. This is evident in the experiences of R2 and R4, who described feeling confused and nervous during

speaking tasks, often making structural errors as a result of overthinking and slow formulation caused by internal translation.

> *"When I translate from Indonesian in my head first, I become nervous and forget what I want to say because I take too long to think. It disrupts my fluency and makes my communication ineffective." (R2)*
> *"I often translate Indonesian in my head before speaking, and the result is that my sentence structure is wrong and the tenses are messy."(R4)*

These mental process of translating from Indonesian before speaking in English is also supported by the questionnaire data below:
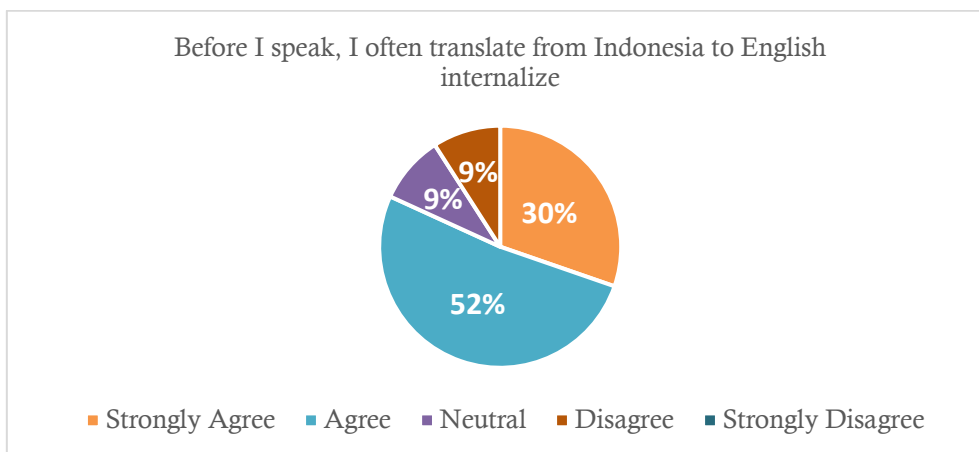

Figure 2. Students' Habit of Internal Translation

Figure 2 shows that 82% of students still translate from Indonesian before speaking English, meaning their thoughts are still shaped by their L1. Only 18% were neutral or disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. This is also supported by the data in figure 3, with 33.3% saying they cannot speak without pauses and 30.3% feeling unsure. This suggests many learners still struggle with fluency due to thinking in their native language before speaking English.
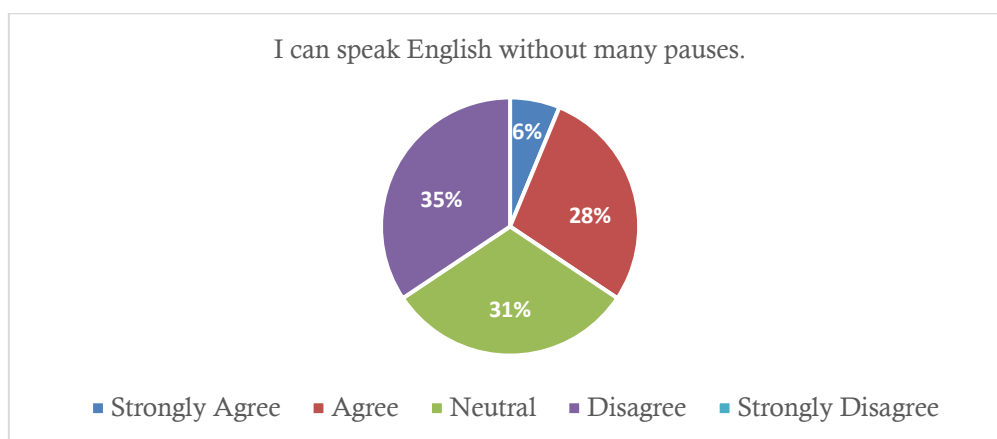

Figure 3. EFL Students' Self-Assessment of Fluency in Speaking English

Overall, these findings confirm that the habit of translating from the L1 not only slows down the pace of communication but also affects sentence structure and grammatical usage (particularly tenses), as well as reduces EFL learners' confidence when speaking spontaneously in English.

Therefore, English teachers need to develop learning strategies that encourage students to think directly in English (L2), rather than through translation. For example, by implementing shadowing techniques, role-playing, and increasing oral practice in natural and meaningful contexts, they can build confidence in speaking spontaneously without fear of mistakes.

Factors contributing to L1 Interference

L1 interference experienced by English education students at the university level does not occur randomly; instead, it is influenced by several interrelated key factors. Based on qualitative data from interviews and the results of questionnaires, four dominant factors were identified as contributing to L1 interference: L1 background, English proficiency level, psychological factors, and learning strategies.

First Language background

Learners' language background significantly influences L1 interference. Students who primarily use Indonesian often transfer its grammatical and phonological features into their English use. This supports Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which posits that the more differences there are between the first and target languages, the higher the likelihood of errors. (Swan & Smith, 2001) also emphasize that many pronunciation, grammar, and structural errors in EFL stem from such cross-linguistic differences.

A common example is tense usage. Since Indonesian does not use grammatical tense, students often struggle with verb forms in English. Participants R1 and R4 reported that they tend to mentally translate from Indonesian before speaking, which frequently results in tense-related errors and unnatural sentence construction.

> *"In my opinion, the Indonesian language still heavily influences my English ability because I was only taught in Indonesian since I was a child. So, when I try to communicate in English, I need to construct the sentence in my mind first." (R1)*
>
> *"In my opinion, the Indonesian language affects my English ability because it is my mother tongue, my first language since birth. As a result, Indonesian has become deeply ingrained in the way we communicate, it could even be considered a habit. So, our brain automatically processes Indonesian language patterns when speaking and then applies those patterns to English as well." (R4)*

From the explanations provided by R1, R2, dan R4, it can be known that the influence of linguistic background, specifically the Indonesian language remains very strong when they attempt to communicate in English. The interference from Indonesian language occurs as they continue to apply Indonesian language sentence structure and language rules to English. This can be observed in the following figure:
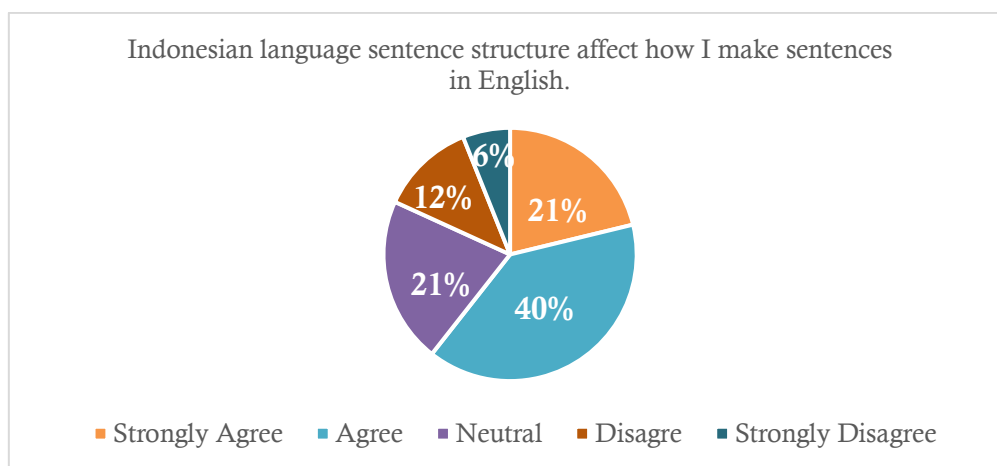

Figure 4. Influence of Indonesian Sentence Structure on English Sentence Construction

Based on the close-ended questionnaire, 40% of respondents agreed and 21% strongly agreed that Indonesian still influences how they form English sentences. Meanwhile, 21% were unsure. This suggests many students still rely on internal translation from Indonesian when speaking English (see Figure 2).

Overall, these findings confirm that Indonesian as the learners' first language still strongly affects their English, especially in grammar and pronunciation causing errors like incorrect word order and tense use.

These findings also highlight the need for English language instruction at the university level to be more responsive to the strong influence of learners' L1. Instructors should recognize that theoretical knowledge of English is insufficient if students continue to think in Indonesian. Therefore, teaching methods should encourage direct thinking and communication in English through strategies such as spontaneous speaking exercises, role-playing, unscripted discussions, and context-based learning.

English proficiency level

English proficiency level strongly influences L1 interference. Learners with lower proficiency often depend on Indonesian language patterns due to limited knowledge of English grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. As a result, they construct sentences based on L1 rules. Yulita (2021) found that low-proficiency learners frequently use literal translation and make grammatical mistakes. This supports Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory, which states that learners create a temporary language system shaped by both their L1 and incomplete L2 knowledge. This study also found similar patterns, where many participants used Indonesian grammar when speaking English. The figure below shows examples of such mixed-language sentences.

Figure 5. EFL Learners' English Proficiency Level

Based on the figure, the majority of respondents agreed that they still often use Indonesian grammar when speaking in English, with 46% selecting "agree." Meanwhile, 21% were neutral, 15% strongly agreed, 18% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. These results indicate that most EFL learners still experience L1 interference, particularly in terms of grammatical structure when speaking English.

This occurrence of used Indonesian grammar when speaking English is largely due to EFL learners' limited understanding of English grammar. The lack of understanding or English language skills is also reflected in the data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire, as follows:

"I make mistakes in English because I don't fully understand the rules of the language itself, and I also feel it's due to a lack of practice." (Q8)
"The reason I make mistakes is because I am still lacking in English grammar." (Q20)
"I make mistakes in using English because I still have difficulty distinguishing the subject in a sentence." (Q33)

In addition, a lack of vocabulary also causes L1 interference.

"The reason I am still often influenced by Indonesian when speaking English is because I still lack English vocabulary." (Q6).

The results from both open- and closed-ended questionnaires show that students with limited grammar tend to form non-standard English sentences, while those with limited vocabulary often mix Indonesian and English, leading to unclear communication. These findings suggest that low English proficiency increases the likelihood of L1 interference. Therefore, English instruction at the

university level should focus more on strengthening students' grammar and vocabulary. Teachers should assess students' proficiency levels and provide step-by-step practice through output-based activities like debates, presentations, discussions, and storytelling without scripts.

Psychological factors

Feelings of nervousness, anxiety, and low self-confidence are major triggers of L1 interference, causing EFL learners to fall back on familiar Indonesian language structures. This aligns with (Krashen, 1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that emotional factors like anxiety and low confidence can hinder language acquisition by raising the "affective filter," making learners more reliant on their L1. This reliance on L1 often leads EFL learners to unconsciously translate between Indonesian and English in their minds.

Several participants reported feeling less confident speaking English due to factors such as the strong dialect, mental translations that made their sentences sound awkward or unnatural. These observations were reflected in open-ended questionnaire responses, such as:

"I feel less confident speaking in English because I have a strong dialect and it usually causes mispronunciation in English." (Q2)
"Well, I feel less confident speaking English when I translate directly from Indonesian to English, and it ends up sounding unnatural and awkward. This eventually makes me overthink during a conversation even though I know what I want to say." (Q4)

This finding is also supported by respondents' statements from the semi-structured interviews, which revealed that L1 interference affects their self-confidence when speaking in English.

"I feel that the influence of Indonesian is very significant on my confidence. When I make grammar or pronunciation mistakes, I'm afraid of being judged by others." (R2)
"Indonesian affects my confidence when I speak English. Especially when I give a presentation in class. I feel nervous because I'm afraid of making grammar or pronunciation mistakes." (R3)

Psychological factors often lead EFL learners to revert to Indonesian sentence structures as a protective mechanism. This tendency disrupts fluency and makes their speech sound unnatural. This pattern was consistently observed in both the questionnaire and interview data, in line with findings that slow processing, fear of making mistakes, and performance pressure often cause learners to rely on their L1 when speaking English.

These findings highlight that psychological aspects are as important as linguistic ones in English learning. Therefore, teachers and lecturers must create a safe, supportive, and judgment-free learning environment. Effective strategies include providing constructive feedback and incorporating confidence-building activities, such as short presentations that emphasize content and delivery, rather than solely focusing on grammatical accuracy.

Learning Strategies

Learning strategie important in acquiring English. However, when learners rely on approaches like grammar memorization and literal translation, they often transfer L1 structures into their English speech (Oxford, 1990). While such strategies may help with writing, they usually hinder fluency and reduce confidence in spontaneous speaking.

This study found that the learning strategies used by EFL learners focused on memorizing grammar and literal translation, which failed to meet their needs, preventing them from speaking English spontaneously without first mentally translating. This pattern was evident in the responses of R1, R4, and R5, who admitted to experiencing difficulties in fluency due to these translation habits.

"If I could start over, I would use a method that involves speaking directly without having to translate from Indonesian to English first. Because now I realize, the more I translate, the greater the chance that Indonesian sentence structures get carried over." (R2)
"If I could repeat my learning method, I would speak more in English without worrying about whether the sentence is right or wrong." (R4)

The statements of R4 and R5 indicate that learning strategies focused on grammar memorization and literal translation contributed to their difficulties in speaking fluently. These approaches often led to frequent pauses and errors, resulting in speech that sounded rigid and unnatural. This aligns with Aljohani (2017), who argued that such strategies are inadequate for developing fluency, as they prioritize form over spontaneous communication.

In contrast, several participants reported improvement in their speaking ability through informal methods such as watching English content on YouTube or TikTok and interacting with native speakers via platforms like OmeTV, where they felt more relaxed and less pressured when speaking or learning English. These non-traditional strategies align with Krashen (1985) *Input Hypothesis*, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful and comprehensible input in language acquisition. According to R3 and R5, engaging in low-pressure, casual environments helped improve their confidence, fluency, and pronunciation.

"To practice and reduce Indonesian language interference, I usually watch English videos on YouTube, TikTok, or watch movies. I try to follow how words are pronounced by watching English-language videos." (R3)

"To practice my pronunciation, I usually learn through YouTube or TikTok, or sometimes I use OmeTV to chat with native speakers. This method is quite effective in improving my English skills." (R5)

Based on the statements of R3 and R5, EFL learners can improve their speaking skills through learning strategies that allow them to become more accustomed to and confident in using English. This suggests that integrating authentic and enjoyable methods outside of formal instruction can significantly support the development of speaking skills, especially when learners are given the space to practice without fear of being judged.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that first language (L1) interference continues to significantly affect the speaking ability of EFL students at the higher education level, particularly in accuracy and fluency. Two major types of interference were identified: grammatical and phonological. Grammatically, learners frequently apply Indonesian sentence structures and rules when speaking English. Phonologically, pronunciation errors often occur due to the absence of equivalent English sounds in Indonesian, prompting learners to substitute unfamiliar phonemes with those familiar in their native language.

Several contributing factors were found to reinforce this interference. Learners' linguistic background strongly influences their tendency to rely on L1 patterns, particularly when their English proficiency is still limited especially in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. This lack of mastery leads to consistent errors in structure and sound. In addition, psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence also play a significant role. These emotional barriers negatively impact learners' willingness to speak and their ability to communicate effectively in both academic and social contexts.

The study further found that institutional and learner-driven strategies often centered around grammar memorization and literal translation do not support spontaneous speaking skills. Instead, learners benefit more from informal, relaxed environments, such as watching English media or conversing via platforms like OmeTV, where they feel less pressure and more freedom to practice.

These findings suggest the need for pedagogical approaches that focus on real-life communication, pronunciation, and grammatical accuracy. Strategies that encourage learners to think directly in English, along with context-rich instruction and safe, low-stress speaking opportunities, are essential.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The participant pool was small and limited to one program. Future research should broaden its scope, use longitudinal methods, and incorporate objective measures of speaking performance for deeper insights into L1 interference.

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