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Examining Speaking Performance, Self Confidence, and Speaking Anxiety in an Integrated English Class: Evidence from First Year English Education Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to diagnose the baseline speaking performance, confidence, and anxiety of 42 first year English Education students during the "Integrated Class" orientation program at Manado State University. Employing a quantitative descriptive approach, the study assessed students' oral speaking performance and affective characteristics using a speaking assessment rubric and a 10 items questionnaire. The results indicated a moderate overall speaking performance, with a mean score of 15.76 out of 25. Among the assessed linguistic dimensions, comprehensibility obtained the highest mean (M = 3.43), whereas grammar received the lowest (M = 2.81), indicating that students could communicate their intended messages but still faced challenges with grammatical accuracy. Regarding affective factors, students reported relatively high conversational comfort (M = 3.45); however, their overall speaking anxiety remained high (composite M = 3.59). Fear of making mistakes emerged as the most prominent source of anxiety (M = 3.76), suggesting that concerns about accuracy and negative evaluation may constrain students' oral participation. These findings demonstrate the importance of identifying students' initial linguistic abilities and affective needs before formal coursework begins. Therefore, pre course orientation programs can function as diagnostic opportunities for informing instructional planning, prioritizing grammar development, and establishing supportive, low anxiety speaking environments that encourage active participation and greater confidence in English communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

First year students in an English Education department face a foundational demand of tertiary level EFL study: command of oral communication. The move from secondary school into higher

education is often difficult (Coertjens et al., 2017), and new students typically show uneven baseline speaking proficiency, low speaking confidence, and foreign language anxiety (Macintyre, 2014; Teimouri et al., 2019). Orientation delivered early helps bridge the gap between secondary preparation and university expectations (Rooij & Jansen, 2018). The "Integrated Class" was designed for this purpose an introductory program for incoming students, held before the first formal semester begins.

Although a substantial body of research has examined learners' speaking performance, affective variables confidence and anxiety in particular appear to shape how actively students participate and how far their language develops (Botes et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019). Anxiety specific to foreign language use, especially the fear of making mistakes and of being evaluated, frequently functions as a filter that suppresses oral output, echoing the affective filter account (Udhayachandran & Sreenivasulu, 2025). In contrast, learners who feel confident and perceive their peers as supportive are more willing to take risks and engage communicatively (Jin et al., 2022). It follows that assessing incoming students on both their actual speaking ability and their emotional disposition at the very start of their studies is essential for designing instruction that responds to their needs.

The main aim of the "Integrated Class" program was to assess first-year students' baseline English speaking ability across four core indicators fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary together with their self-perceived confidence and anxiety when speaking (Botes et al., 2020; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; Udhayachandran & Sreenivasulu, 2025). By building a complete diagnostic profile of incoming students before formal instruction begins, the program fulfills two key functions: it provides empirically grounded baseline data to guide future curriculum design and instructional decision-making, and it serves as a practical reference for the lecturers assigned to teach these cohorts. Knowing students' initial linguistic and affective characteristics allows educators to adapt teaching materials, adopt more learner-sensitive approaches, and introduce targeted interventions from the very beginning (Bach et al., 2025; Geel et al., n.d.).

Gap of this study is although speaking performance and affective factors have been studied extensively in tertiary EFL contexts (Wang et al., 2024), far less attention has been devoted to diagnostic assessment conducted specifically during the pre-course orientation phase. Existing studies tend to measure foreign language anxiety and confidence at mid-semester or semester's end, often overlooking the critical transitional period before formal instruction begins (Youzhi & Qingyun, 2025). Moreover, because prior research has generally examined speaking skills and psychological barriers in isolation (Farokhipour et al., 2018; Ismael & Li, 2025; Soomro et al., 2023), empirical work that simultaneously integrates objective speaking evaluation with self-perceived affective domains to establish an initial diagnostic benchmark for instructional planning remains scarce.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the "Integrated Class" program as a proactive, early-stage diagnostic framework for incoming first-year students in an English Education department. Unlike conventional orientation programs, which center on administrative procedures and general university adjustment (Liu, 2021), this intervention operates as a dual-purpose mechanism: a low-stakes environment in which students can begin speaking English with greater ease, and an empirical diagnostic instrument for educators. By capturing baseline data on discrete performance metrics (fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) alongside affective dimensions (confidence and anxiety) before the first lecture, the study offers a new approach to early pedagogical planning in higher education (Mladenovici et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study pursues two linked objectives. The first is to profile incoming first-year students through their participation in the "Integrated Class" program, examining their speaking performance across the five indicators together with their self-reported levels of speaking confidence and anxiety. The second is to integrate these linguistic and affective findings into a single, empirically grounded baseline of the cohort. That baseline is intended to function as a working reference for lecturers and curriculum developers informing instructional strategies, the selection of pedagogical materials, and the design of supportive classroom environments in the semesters that follow.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to diagnose the baseline speaking performance, speaking confidence, and speaking anxiety of newly admitted first year students. The research was carried out as an integral evaluation component of the "Integrated Class" program, a community-service-based orientation initiative held from August 13 to 19, 2026, at Manado State University. The target population comprised newly admitted students of the English Education Department before the start of their first formal academic semester. Total population sampling was used to all 42 students in the cohort completed both the oral speaking performance assessment and the self-reported affective questionnaire.

Data collection consisted of two distinct components, one measuring linguistic performance and the other affective perceptions. Oral speaking performance was assessed through a structured simulation task in which participants delivered short individual presentations and took part in interactive group discussions. Each student's oral production was recorded and independently rated by trained raters using an analytical scoring rubric adapted from Brown (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019), covering five components namely comprehensibility, fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Each rated on a 5-point scale (maximum total score of 25). In parallel, affective factors were measured with a 10-item questionnaire adapted from foreign language anxiety and confidence frameworks adapted and developed from Horwitz (Horwitz et al., 1986), using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and divided into two subscales: Statements 1–5 for self-perceived speaking confidence and Statements 6–10 for speaking anxiety.

The research instruments were reviewed by three experts in English Language Teaching (ELT), who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of the assessment criteria and questionnaire items. Item validity was then examined through Pearson product moment correlations computed in SPSS using data from 42 participants. At the 5% significance level with N = 42 (df = 40), the critical table value was r = .304. All corrected item total correlations exceeded this value, so every item met the validity criterion. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of .605; exceeding the minimum threshold of .60 adopted for this study, the instrument demonstrated acceptable, though relatively modest, internal consistency.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Community service activities with the program, known as the "Integrated Class," was specifically designed for new students at Manado State University, with 42 students participating in it. Based on table 1 which can be seen below shows the gender data of the participants of the Community service activities which is being held from August 13 to 19, 2026. The following demographic characteristics are analyzed to describe the distribution of research participants in the form of gender as seen in table 1 below.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

		GENDER			
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Male	11	26.2	26.2	26.2
	Female	31	73.8	73.8	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

As illustrated in Table 1, the demographic composition of the participants reveals a significant gender disparity within the program. Out of the 42 participating new students from Manado State University, females constituted the overwhelming majority at 73.8% ($n = 31$), whereas male

participants accounted for only 26.2% ($n = 11$). This notable skew toward female representation reflects broader enrollment trends in community service and educational engagement programs at the university level. Furthermore, establishing this baseline gender distribution provides crucial context for evaluating participant engagement, dynamics, and outcomes throughout the "Integrated Class" community service.

3.1. Students' Speaking Performance

To evaluate the participants' speaking performance, this study adopted the analytical oral scoring framework proposed by (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019) as a foundational reference in English Language Teaching (ELT) and language assessment, Brown's rubric provides a validated construct for measuring oral production across five core linguistic dimensions: *fluency*, *pronunciation*, *grammar*, *vocabulary*, and *comprehensibility*. Each component was assessed on a five points analytic scale as shown in Table 2 below, resulting in a maximum cumulative score of 25. Utilizing Brown's framework ensures both theoretical validity and objectivity in diagnosing the students' communicative competence in a structured manner.

Table 2. Likert scale rubric

No	Score	General Description
1	5	Excellent
2	4	Good
3	3	Fair
4	2	Poor
5	1	Very poor

Prior to evaluating overall speaking performance, the descriptive statistics for each assessed speaking component were computed to examine data distribution and variability. Table 3 details the sample metrics ($N = 42$) for the five evaluated dimensions: comprehensibility, fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. These metrics encompass the score ranges (minimum and maximum), standard deviations, and variances, providing a foundational baseline for interpreting the students' communicative strengths and areas requiring further instruction.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Performance

	Statistics					
	Comprehensibility	**Fluency**	**Pronunciation**	**Grammar**	**Vocabulary**	**Total**
Valid	42	42	42	42	42	42
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.4286	3.1429	3.2143	2.8095	3.1667	15.7619
Median	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	15.5000
Std. Deviation	.94075	.97709	.81258	.77264	.76243	3.22951
Variance	.885	.955	.660	.597	.581	10.430
Range	4.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	15.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	8.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	23.00

Based on the descriptive statistics presented in Table 3, the distribution of scores reveals varying levels of proficiency and dispersion across the five evaluated speaking domains. Both *fluency* (SD = 0.977, variance = 0.955) and *comprehensibility* (SD = 0.941, variance = 0.885) demonstrated the highest score dispersion, with participants' scores spanning the entire available scale range from 1.00 to 5.00. Conversely, *grammar* exhibited the most constrained score distribution (SD = 0.773, variance = 0.597), with scores ranging only between 2.00 and 4.00, indicating the absence of both the lowest-tier (1.00) and

highest-tier (5.00) ratings among participants. Furthermore, *vocabulary* recorded the lowest standard deviation (SD = 0.762) and variance (0.581), reflecting the most consistent score distribution among the five speaking domains. Overall, these metrics highlight that students demonstrated relatively consistent performance in vocabulary and grammar, although grammar had the lowest mean score (M = 2.81), while greater individual variation was observed in fluency and comprehensibility.

These results reveal differences between students' performance in language related components and their spontaneous spoken production. While vocabulary demonstrated the lowest score variability, grammar showed a relatively consistent distribution despite having the lowest mean score. In contrast, fluency and comprehensibility exhibited greater individual variation, suggesting that students differed in their ability to maintain continuous speech and communicate ideas clearly. These findings underscore the need for targeted practice to improve grammatical accuracy and develop fluency and comprehensibility in oral communication.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Interpretation of Students' Speaking Performance

Speaking Aspect	Mean	SD	Min–Max	Interpretation
Comprehensibility	3.43	0.941	1–5	Good
Fluency	3.14	0.977	1–5	Fair
Pronunciation	3.21	0.813	2–5	Fair
Grammar	2.81	0.773	2–4	Fair
Vocabulary	3.17	0.762	2–5	Fair
Overall Speaking Performance	15.76/25	3.230	8–23	Fair (Moderate)

The findings indicate that students demonstrated fair to moderate speaking performance during the program, with a mean total score of 15.76 out of 25. Comprehensibility was their strongest aspect (M=3.43), while grammar was the weakest (M=2.81). Overall, the results suggest that students could communicate understandably but still needed to improve grammatical accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. These findings highlight the importance of continued speaking practice to develop students' overall English-speaking skills (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; Council of Europe, 2020).

To gain a more granular understanding of the participants' oral performance, a frequency distribution analysis was conducted for each individual speaking sub skill. As one of the core dimensions in Brown's (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019) analytical framework, *comprehensibility* evaluates how easily and effectively a speaker's message can be understood by listeners. Table 5 illustrates the frequency, percentage, valid percentage, and cumulative percentage distribution of comprehensibility scores among the participating students ($N = 42$) following the implementation of the "Integrated Class" community service program.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of speaking performance regarding the comprehensibility aspect.

		Comprehensibility			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	1	2.4	2.4	2.4
	2.00	4	9.5	9.5	11.9
	3.00	19	45.2	45.2	57.1
	4.00	12	28.6	28.6	85.7
	5.00	6	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

As depicted in Table 5, the majority of participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of comprehensibility in their oral delivery. The largest group of students, comprising 19 participants (45.2%), received a score of 3.00, indicating a moderate level of comprehensibility. Furthermore, 12 students (28.6%) achieved a score of 4.00, while 6 students (14.3%) obtained the highest score of 5.00. Overall, 66.7% of participants achieved scores of 3.00 or higher, indicating that most students could communicate their ideas with reasonable clarity. Conversely, only a small proportion received lower scores, with 1 student (2.4%) scoring 1.00 and 4 students (9.5%) scoring 2.00. This result suggest that although some students still experienced difficulties in making their speech understandable, most participants demonstrated satisfactory comprehensibility during the program. The descriptive statistical results for the fluency aspect are then presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of speaking performance regarding the fluency aspect.

		Fluency			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	1	2.4	2.4	2.4
	2.00	10	23.8	23.8	26.2
	3.00	17	40.5	40.5	66.7
	4.00	10	23.8	23.8	90.5
	5.00	4	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 6, the distribution of fluency scores indicates that most students demonstrated a moderate level of speaking fluency. The largest group, comprising 17 students (40.5%), received a score of 3.00, while 10 students (23.8%) scored 4.00 and 4 students (9.5%) achieved the highest score of 5.00. Overall, 73.8% of participants obtained scores of 3.00 or higher, indicating that most students demonstrated a reasonable level of speech continuity. However, 10 students (23.8%) received a score of 2.00, and 1 student (2.4%) scored 1.00. These findings suggest that although most participants demonstrated moderate to good fluency, some students still needed to improve their speaking smoothness, reduce hesitation, and maintain a more continuous flow of speech. The descriptive statistical results for the pronunciation aspect are then presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of speaking performance regarding the pronunciation aspect.

		Pronunciation			
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	2.00	8	19.0	19.0	19.0
	3.00	19	45.2	45.2	64.3
	4.00	13	31.0	31.0	95.2
	5.00	2	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

The frequency distribution for pronunciation scores indicates that most students demonstrated moderate to high levels of pronunciation performance. As shown in Table 6, the largest group, consisting of 19 students (45.2%), received a score of 3.00, followed by 13 students (31.0%) who scored 4.00 and 2 students (4.8%) who achieved the highest score of 5.00. Meanwhile, 8 students (19.0%) received a score of 2.00, and none scored 1.00. Overall, 81.0% of participants achieved a pronunciation score of 3.00 or higher, suggesting that most students demonstrated a reasonable ability to pronounce

English words intelligibly. However, the proportion scoring 2.00 indicates that some participants may still need additional practice to improve pronunciation accuracy and clarity. The descriptive statistical results for the grammar aspect are then presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of speaking performance regarding the grammar aspect.

		Grammar			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	17	40.5	40.5	40.5
	3.00	16	38.1	38.1	78.6
	4.00	9	21.4	21.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the frequency table for grammar performance, students' scores were concentrated at the lower to middle levels, with no participants receiving scores of 1.00 or 5.00. The largest group, consisting of 17 students (40.5%), received a score of 2.00, while 16 students (38.1%) scored 3.00. The remaining 9 students (21.4%) achieved a score of 4.00. Overall, 59.5% of participants scored 3.00 or higher, while 40.5% scored 2.00. These findings indicate that grammatical accuracy remained a challenge for a considerable proportion of students during oral communication. Although some participants demonstrated stronger grammatical performance, further practice in sentence structure and grammatical accuracy is needed to support more effective English speaking. The descriptive statistical results for the vocabulary aspect are then presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of speaking performance regarding the vocabulary aspect.

		Vocabulary			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	8	19.0	19.0	19.0
	3.00	20	47.6	47.6	66.7
	4.00	13	31.0	31.0	97.6
	5.00	1	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

As illustrated in the frequency table for vocabulary performance, students' scores were concentrated in the moderate to high range, with no participants receiving a score of 1.00. The largest group, consisting of 20 students (47.6%), received a score of 3.00, while 13 students (31.0%) achieved a score of 4.00 and 1 student (2.4%) attained the highest score of 5.00. Overall, 81.0% of participants scored 3.00 or higher, while 8 students (19.0%) received a score of 2.00. These findings suggest that most participants had a functional vocabulary range to express their ideas during the speaking activities, although further vocabulary development may help improve their word choice and expressive flexibility.

3.2. Students' Speaking Confidence

To assess students' speaking confidence, a five items questionnaire using a 5 points Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*) was administered. The items evaluated key affective indicators: public speaking confidence (S1), expressing opinions in class (S2), conversational comfort (S3), speaking without fear of making mistakes (S4), and peer communication readiness (S5). Table 10 presents the descriptive statistics ($N = 42$) for each item following the "Integrated Class" program.

Tabel 10. Descriptive statistics of students' speaking confidence

		Statistics				
		Statement1	**Statement2**	**Statement3**	**Statement4**	**Statement5**
N	Valid	42	42	42	42	42
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.7381	2.6667	3.4524	2.4762	3.2857
Median		3.0000	3.0000	4.0000	3.0000	3.0000
Std. Deviation		1.08334	1.14053	1.27265	1.04153	.99476
Minimum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

As shown in Table 10, participants ($N = 42$) exhibited the highest confidence in informal and interpersonal contexts, specifically in conversational comfort (S3: $M = 3.45, SD = 1.27$) and peer to peer communication readiness (S5: $M = 3.29, SD = 0.99$). Conversely, confidence declined in evaluative and public domains, including speaking in front of peers (S1: $M = 2.74, SD = 1.08$) and sharing opinions in class (S2: $M = 2.67, SD = 1.14$). The lowest mean score was observed for speaking without fear of making mistakes (S4: $M = 2.48, SD = 1.04$). Overall, while the program successfully enhanced interpersonal conversational engagement, fear of errors during formal delivery remains the primary psychological barrier for new students.

3.3. Students' Speaking Anxiety

To identify the affective barriers influencing oral performance, students' foreign language anxiety was evaluated using a five items questionnaire (Statements 6 to 10) on a 5 points Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The items assessed public speaking nervousness (S6), fear of committing errors (S7), spontaneous speech anxiety (S8), fear of negative peer evaluation (S9), and low self efficacy (S10). Table 11 summarizes the descriptive statistics ($N = 42$) for each anxiety indicator following the "Integrated Class" program.

Tabel 11. Descriptive statistics of students' Speaking Anxiety

		Statistics				
		Statement6	**Statement7**	**Statement8**	**Statement9**	**Statement10**
N	Valid	42	42	42	42	42
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.5476	3.7619	3.6190	3.5714	3.4524
Median		4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	3.5000
Std. Deviation		1.21379	1.14358	1.22877	1.34605	1.31042
Minimum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

As shown in Table 10, participants ($N = 42$) reported an overall high level of speaking anxiety (composite $M = 3.59$). fear of committing errors as the top concern (S7: $M = 3.76$), followed by spontaneous speech anxiety (S8: $M = 3.62$), fear of negative peer evaluation (S9: $M = 3.57$), public speaking nervousness (S6: $M = 3.55$), and low self-efficacy (S10: $M = 3.45$). These findings confirm that accuracy fears and formal evaluative pressure remain the dominant affective barriers for students.

Discussion

The present study addressed the linguistic and affective challenges experienced by newly admitted university students as they transition into tertiary level English Education programs (Yuezu

Mao, 2024). Incoming first-year students frequently face a dual demand: acquiring complex academic oral proficiency while contending with foreign language anxiety and, often, low self-confidence (Seçkin, 2025). Although prior research has extensively examined speaking performance and affective factors, a significant gap persists (Ma, 2022; Monib, 2025): most studies measure these variables during mid semester or post instruction phases, overlooking the baseline assessment window of pre-course orientation. Consequently, educators often begin formal coursework without a diagnostic understanding of students' initial communicative strengths and affective characteristics.

To address this gap, the "Integrated Class" program functioned as an early stage diagnostic framework administered before formal instruction at Manado State University (N = 42). The findings yielded a baseline profile of the cohort: overall speaking performance was fair to moderate (M = 15.76, of a possible 25), with satisfactory comprehensibility (M = 3.43) but marked weakness in grammar (M = 2.81), alongside a moderate to high level of speaking anxiety (composite M = 3.59, SD) in which fear of making mistakes or fear of committing errors was the most elevated concern (M = 3.76). Capturing these metrics at the onset of students' academic journey bridges pre university preparation and university level instructional planning (Vrieling et al., 2018). This approach is supported by previous research highlighting the importance of identifying students' linguistic and affective needs early to inform targeted instructional strategies and facilitate their transition to university level learning (Miller & Kastens, 2017; Stratton, 2020).

In line with the quantitative descriptive design, students' affective states were categorized using Brown's (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019) 5 points class interval criteria, with each mean assigned to its band These findings are also consistent with previous research that employed the same class interval criteria method ((Hussain Alkharusi, 2022) . The contrast between high conversational comfort (Statement 3: M = 3.45) and low error tolerance (Statement 4: M = 2.48) is consistent with related research (Ashktorab & Liao, 2019) situated account of L2 willingness to communicate, in which communicative readiness varies with perceived evaluative pressure (Zhang et al., 2018). Similarly, the low grammar mean (M = 2.81) alongside high speaking anxiety (M = 3.59) aligns with (Daud et al., 2019; Mora et al., 2023) affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that anxiety may raise the filter and impede the processing that spontaneous grammatical accuracy requires. Finally, the rubric adapted from (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019) differentiated the linguistic sub-skills: fluency and comprehensibility showed wider dispersion ($SD \approx 0.94 - 0.98$) than vocabulary and grammar. The results of this study are also supported by previous research, which indicates a significant disparity between comprehensibility and grammar and vocabulary (Saito et al., 2016; Suzuki & Kormos, 2020).

These outcomes are consistent with broader findings in foreign language acquisition research. The prominence of error-related anxiety as the primary hindrance to oral production parallels (Abdallah, 2026), who reported fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation can discourage learners from participating in English communication. Similarly, the grammatical weakness among the first-year students aligns with the pattern noted in the literature (Cop & Hatfield, 2016; Siwaporn Suvarnamani, 2017), whereby learners typically achieve communicative comprehensibility well before mastering formal morphological accuracy underscoring the value of identifying affective hurdles early in higher education (Hanna et al., 2026).

Practically, the findings suggest that curriculum designers should avoid launching directly into demanding academic drills; instead, the opening weeks of future semesters should incorporate low-stakes, error-tolerant speaking environments and explicit affective scaffolding, designed to ease the anxiety that raises students' affective filter. This recommendation aligns with (Bulbul Hajiyeva, 2024; Sana & Aqsa Atta, 2024) who emphasizes the importance of understanding anxious language learners' experiences and addressing their needs to support more effective foreign language learning. Ultimately, the study's contribution lies in redefining community service oriented orientation programs not merely as social adaptation events, but as proactive, empirical diagnostic instruments. By integrating objective speaking scores (rubric adapted from (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019)) with self-reported affective measures (Horwitz et al., 1986) before the first formal semester, the research offers

tertiary EFL programs an entry-assessment approach that aligns curriculum formulation and instructional strategy with students' affective and linguistic profiles from the outset.

4. CONCLUSION

In assessing the students' speaking performance, the incoming cohort generally demonstrated a moderate level of spoken English ability. A key strength observed across the group was their overall comprehensibility, showing that most freshmen could successfully get their message across and be understood by others. On the flip side, grammatical precision stood out as the main hurdle, with many participants struggling to maintain structural accuracy when speaking spontaneously. While their vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency were reasonably functional for basic communication, the results clearly point to a need for structured, ongoing support in formal language mechanics as they begin their university studies.

Looking at speaking confidence and anxiety, a clear contrast emerged between how students feel in casual versus formal situations. The orientation setting helped build a friendly, informal dynamic where students felt relatively comfortable chatting with their peers. However, this confidence tended to fade once formal academic expectations came into play. A strong wave of anxiety was evident across the group, largely driven by a deep-seated fear of making mistakes and the pressure of put-on-the-spot speaking tasks. These emotional barriers act as a heavy filter, often causing students to hold back rather than participate freely in class conversations.

These findings carry practical value for both university educators and future research. First year lecturers can use pre course orientation activities as an early diagnostic tool to get a realistic read on their new students before regular classes begin. To help students settle in, teaching strategies during the initial semester should focus on creating low pressure, supportive environments where making mistakes is treated as a normal part of learning rather than something to be feared. Lastly, future studies could build on this work by following cohorts over a longer period to see how tailored classroom support helps build both language skills and personal confidence over time.

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