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Neuro-Linguistic Programming Implementation Challenges in EFL Speaking Instruction: An Ethnographic Inquiry

Nurlaila Wattiheluw^{1*}, Murni Mahmud¹, Amirullah Abduh¹

^{1*} Fakultas Bahasa dan Sastra, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

*Correspondence e-mail: nurlaila.w@student.unm.ac.id

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Abstract

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a structured pedagogical approach that integrates cognitive, affective, linguistic, and experiential dimensions in EFL speaking instruction. Although NLP has been considered theoretically promising, the practical challenges of its implementation in Indonesian higher education remain underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the challenges encountered by an EFL lecturer during NLP implementation in speaking instruction. Employing a qualitative ethnographic design, data were collected over one full academic semester at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia, through in-depth interviews, participatory classroom observation, weekly student self-reflection, and documentary evidence. One experienced NLP-practising lecturer and twenty-five purposively selected students participated in the study. Data were analysed through ethnographic procedures involving inductive coding, contextual interpretation, and multi-source triangulation. Findings reveal five interconnected challenge dimensions: instructional design complexity, conceptual comprehension barriers, time constraints, linguistic challenges during speaking practice, and reflective evaluation difficulties. These findings collectively reconceptualise NLP as instructionally demanding and contextually grounded framework rather than a universally applicable method, contributing a rare ethnographic perspective to NLP research in Indonesian EFL higher education. Future research should examine institutional support strategies, including structured lecturer training, curriculum flexibility, and assessment reform, as well as conduct comparative studies across lecturers at varying NLP competency levels to determine whether the identified challenges are inherent to NLP as a pedagogical system or contingent on practitioner expertise.

Keywords: Challenges; EFL Speaking Instruction; Ethnographic Inquiry; Neuro-Linguistic Programming



1. Introduction

The increasing emphasis on communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts has shifted pedagogical priorities toward approaches that not only develop linguistic accuracy but also address learners' psychological and affective dimensions (Purnama et al., 2023; Rostami et al., 2024; Rustan, 2022). Among these approaches, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) has gained attention as a potentially transformative framework for enhancing learners' confidence, motivation, and engagement in language learning.

Yet existing literature on NLP in EFL has predominantly focused on demonstrating motivational and affective gains, leaving its practical implementation challenges and the multidimensional complexities that constrain its classroom application substantially underexplored (Passmore & Rowson, 2019; Purnama et al., 2023; Rustan, 2022).

Understanding what NLP offers to EFL pedagogy, however, requires a closer examination of its theoretical origins and the core principles that underpin its application in language learning contexts. Originating from the work of Grinder & Bandler (1975) in the 1970s, NLP is a psychological and communicative approach that explores the triadic relationship between neurological processes (*neuro*), language patterns (*linguistic*), and behavioural strategies derived from subjective experience (*programming*). At its core, NLP posits that human perception, communication, and behaviour are shaped by internal representational systems primarily visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (VAK) modalities—and that deliberate manipulation of these systems can produce meaningful shifts in learning outcomes and interpersonal effectiveness (O'Connor & Seymour, 1993).

NLP employs various techniques, including rapport-building, anchoring, reframing, visualisation, and modelling, all of which are intended to optimise the affective and cognitive conditions that support language acquisition (Revell & Norman, 1997; Tosey & Mathinson, 2010). These techniques are grounded in the view that language learning is not merely a cognitive endeavour, but also a holistic and experiential process in which learners' internal states, belief systems, and sensory engagement play significant roles (Millrood, 2004; Sturt et al., 2012). This holistic orientation positions NLP as a theoretically promising yet practically complex framework for EFL speaking instruction.

In the field of EFL Learning, NLP is implemented based on four pillars (Revell & Norman, 1997:16). These could be said to be the 'mind' of NLP or the fundamental concepts which support everything else. The pillars are outcomes, rapport, sensory acuity, and flexibility. In NLP, the term outcomes refers to something that individual wants (O'Connor, 2001). The second pillar is Rapport, it is a way of maximizing similarities and minimizing differences between people at a nonconscious level. Rapport is the quality of the relationship that results in mutual trust and responsiveness. The third, sensory acuity is also a process used to train our sensitivity to consciously and effectively observe, hear, and feel non-verbal signals. When good sensory acuity is possessed, non-verbal signals conveyed by the conversation partner are more accurately noticed, monitored, and interpreted (Yuliawan, 2022:226). The fourth pillar is flexibility,

it means that something different should be done if what is being done isn't working and isn't getting the desired results. Building upon these pillars, Revell and Norman developed a set of basic actions that serve as the foundational framework for NLP implementation, as illustrated in the figure 1 below.

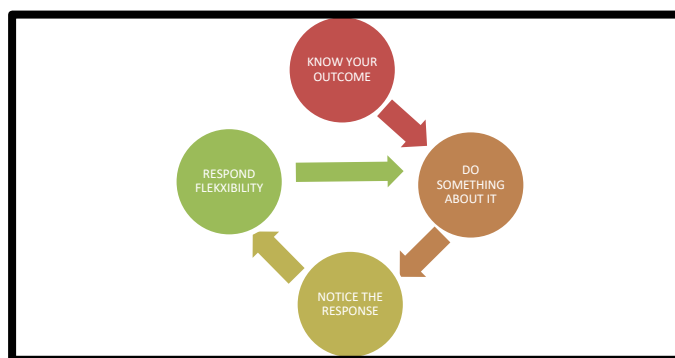


Figure 1. NLP Basic Action Model

The basic action model of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, as illustrated in Figure 1, begins with *knowing your outcome*, which refers to having a clear and specific understanding of what one aims to achieve. The second step, *taking action*, typically involves interaction with others; therefore, establishing rapport is crucial. Even when the action is carried out individually, maintaining rapport with oneself remains essential. The third step, *noticing the response*, is closely related to sensory acuity, as it requires careful attention to feedback from the environment. Finally, the fourth step, *responding with flexibility*, involves having a range of alternative strategies or options for determining the next course of action. According to Revell and Norman, these basic actions are inherently adaptable and can be further refined and modified to suit the specific learning needs addressed by other practitioners in their respective instructional contexts.

Existing studies have predominantly highlighted the potential benefits of NLP in reducing anxiety (Nompo et al., 2021; John et al., 2025 ; Rostami et al., 2024), increasing motivation (Haidir, 2024), and fostering learner awareness (Zhang et al., 2023). However, these studies have tended to focus more on learning outcomes than on the challenges of classroom implementation. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how NLP functions as a pedagogical system in authentic instructional settings, particularly in contexts where learners are transitioning from procedural to metacognitive modes of learning. This gap is especially evident in Indonesian higher education, where research on NLP in EFL speaking has largely been confined to lower educational contexts and has rarely explored how lecturers negotiate the instructional demands and constraints of NLP-based teaching from their perspectives as practitioners. Furthermore, the complexity of NLP as an instructional approach that encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions suggests that its implementation cannot be reduced to a mere set of techniques. Rather, it requires systematic instructional

design, contextual adaptation, and pedagogical expertise. However, little empirical research has critically examined the multidimensional challenges faced by lecturers when integrating NLP into speaking instruction from their perspectives as practitioners (Ginting & Hartati, 2023).

Addressing this gap, this study aims to explore the challenges encountered by the lecturer during its application. In doing so, this study responds to several under addressed gaps in the existing literature, establishing its novelty across three interrelated dimensions. First, this study addresses a practical knowledge gap identified by Ginting & Hartati (2023), who called for investigation into the barriers and challenges lecturers face when applying NLP strategies in EFL classrooms. Second, Existing study have concentrated on lower educational levels (Fidinillah, 2017), leaving the Indonesian higher education context, particularly within EFL speaking skill instruction, substantially underexplored (Rustan, 2022). Third, this study contributes a methodological novelty by employing a sustained ethnographic design an approach that remains rare in NLP and EFL research, which has largely relied on experimental, quasi-experimental, or survey-based methods. Ethnographic inquiry uniquely enables the researcher to access the emic or insider perspectives of the lecturer and students, to observe how implementation challenges manifest and evolve across the learning process, and to situate these challenges within the broader cultural, institutional, and sociolinguistic context of Indonesian Islamic higher education.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design. Ethnography is a qualitative research design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was considered most appropriate because instructional implementation challenges are contextually situated and temporally dynamic phenomena. Rather than being reducible to a single measurement point, they develop and are negotiated progressively within the authentic realities of classroom interaction and practice.

2.1 Research Participant

The study was conducted at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia, within the *Tadris Bahasa Inggris (TBI)* Study Program during the even semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. The primary informant (lecturer) was selected through purposive sampling based on two key criteria: first, lecturer had a documented record of NLP implementation in EFL speaking instruction grounded in the pillars and basic action, as presented in the table 1 below.

**Table 1. Pedagogical Adaptation Stages of Implementing NLP
In EFL Speaking Instruction**

Stages	Purpose	Lecturers' Activities
Outcome setting	To clarify what student's need and expect to achieve in speaking learning process.	1. Positive questioning to explore students' needs. 2. Identifying students' needs. 3. Formulating specific and measurable outcomes. 4. Outcomes are documented and visualised, to become the foundation for instructional design
Planning	To design and organize instruction systematically based on the outcomes (students' needs).	1. Formulating learning objectives. 2. Selecting topic and materials 3. Choosing and integrating NLP techniques 4. Designing assessment and evaluation 5. Preparing lesson flow and classroom activities
Action	To implement NLP techniques dynamically in learning activities to enhance student' engagement, confidence and speaking performance.	1. Building rapport 2. sensory awareness (VAKOG). 3. Flexibility (Using Variate NLP techniques such as, verbal mirroring pacing and leading, perceptual position, modelling, and anchoring)
Evaluation	To determine the extent to which the outcome have been achieved and to inform improvement	1. Reflection (measuring the achievement of predetermine outcomes) 2. Analysing result to identify strengths and area to improve.

Second, the lecturer had published an academic article related to NLP, which serves as an indicator of both theoretical understanding and practical familiarity with the approach. Additionally, 25 students were included as secondary informants on the grounds that they had undergone the full NLP-based instructional process and could thus offer reliable corroborating data on the implementation challenges encountered throughout the semester. Participation in this study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants' identities were kept confidential throughout the research process.

2.2 Research Instrument

To address the research objectives, this study employed multiple qualitative data sources to facilitate data triangulation and enhance credibility. The primary data consisted of three sources: first, the lecturer's verbal accounts obtained through semi-structured interviews; second, participatory observation data gathered through direct classroom observations; and third, weekly students' reflective journals administered at the end of each class session documenting students' learning experiences throughout the instructional process. Secondary data were derived from instructional document (lesson

plan), which provided contextual evidence of the lecturer and students' activities from initial activities undertaken during the study.

2.3 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously and continuously alongside data collection, consistent with the iterative nature of ethnographic inquiry (Jones & Watt, 2010). The analysis followed four sequential stages. Data organization and familiarization. Interview transcripts, observation field notes, student reflective diaries, and documentary data were compiled, categorized by source, and reviewed repeatedly. This stage allowed the researcher to develop familiarity with the range and nature of challenges reported and observed, and to identify preliminary patterns for subsequent systematic analysis. Coding and categorization. All data were examined line by line to identify statements, events, and accounts indicative of difficulty, constraint, or barrier in NLP implementation. Interpretation. Each identified challenge was interpreted within the socio-educational context of the study. This stage examined the conditions under which challenges arose, how the lecturer and students negotiated or responded to difficulties, and how broader institutional and linguistic factors shaped the implementation context. Consistent with ethnographic inquiry, interpretation foregrounded participants' perspectives and lived experiences rather than imposing external analytical categories. Triangulation, to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, all identified challenge themes were cross-verified across at least two independent data sources (Saldana, 2011).

3. Results and Discussions

This section presents the five interconnected challenge dimensions as shown in figure 2, identified through sustained ethnographic inquiry conducted over one full academic semester.

Figure 2. Five interconnected challenge dimensions

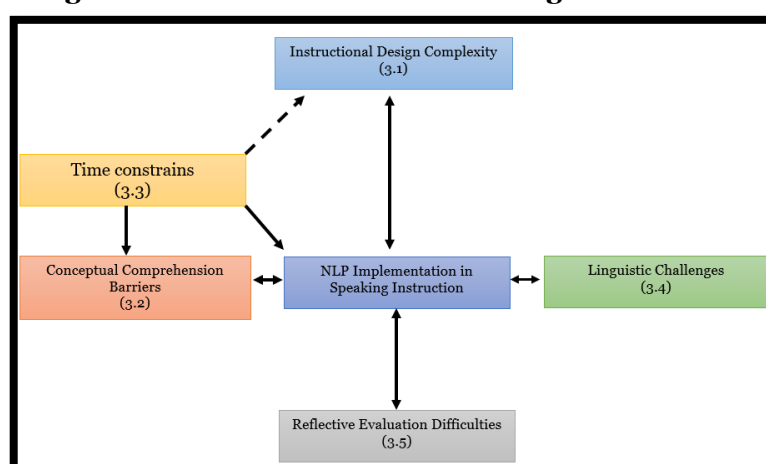


Figure 2 show the conceptual diagram of five interconnected challenge dimensions in NLP-based EFL speaking instruction. Solid arrows indicate direct bidirectional relationships between each challenge and the central implementation process. Dashed

lines indicate cross-cutting influences between challenge dimensions. All five dimensions are situated within the broader ethnographic context of Indonesian Islamic higher education at UIN Saizu Purwokerto.

Consistent with the ethnographic inquiry, the analysis foregrounds the emic perspectives of participants, particularly the lecturer as the primary practitioner while situating their experiences within the broader cultural, institutional, and sociolinguistic context of UIN Saizu Purwokerto as an Islamic state university in Central Java, Indonesia. Each challenge dimension is not treated as an isolated instructional problem, but as a culturally embedded phenomenon that reflects the intersection of pedagogical demands, institutional constraints, and locally specific cultural norms. The discussion integrates data from multiple sources in-depth interviews, participatory classroom observations, student reflective journals, and lesson plan documents to construct a thick description of the implementation challenges in ways that honour the complexity and contextual specificity of the setting. Each dimension is then discussed in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies, with particular attention to how the ethnographic lens reveals dimensions of challenge that other methodological approaches would likely have rendered invisible.

3.1 Instructional Design Complexity

The major challenge concerned the complexity of designing NLP-based speaking instruction that was pedagogically sound, culturally relevant, and feasible within the institutional curriculum. NLP frameworks, as derived from sources such as Revell and Norman (1997), O'Connor (2001), and Yuliawan (2022), were not originally designed for Indonesian EFL classrooms and therefore required extensive adaptation.

The lecturer adopted a three-stage instructional framework, planning, action, and evaluation which demanded careful integration of multiple components, including outcome setting, lesson plan development, topic selection, the selection of NLP techniques (e.g., verbal mirroring, pacing-leading, perceptual positions, modelling, and anchoring), instructional media (videos, Google Jamboard, Google Classroom), and culturally familiar speaking topics such as *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations. The lecturer articulated these demands as follows:

“The development of a lesson plan is a primary aspect that must be considered, as it is crucial in determining the initial success of the learning process. This is not an easy task, as it requires ensuring that students’ needs are adequately addressed. The selection of topics, NLP techniques, and supporting learning media is also quite time-consuming when designing the lesson plan”
(Interview with lecturer, August 11, 2024).

The interview findings indicate that lesson planning plays a fundamental role in the success of the learning process. The lecturer emphasized that developing an effective lesson plan is not a simple task, as it requires careful consideration to ensure that students’ needs are adequately addressed. This process involves selecting appropriate topics such as *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations, determining suitable NLP techniques, and choosing

supporting instructional media. These components must be aligned to facilitate meaningful learning experiences. However, the lecturer also highlighted that designing such a comprehensive plan is time-consuming, reflecting the complexity and importance of thorough preparation in instructional practice.

This process was neither simple nor quick. Document analysis as seen in figure 3) and interview data revealed that instructional design was conducted intensively over one week.

Matakuliah Syarat						
Mg Ke-	Sub-CPMK (Kemampuan akhir tiap tahapan belajar)	Penilaian		Bentuk Pembelajaran, Metode Pembelajaran, Penugasan Mahasiswa [Estimasi Waktu]		Materi Pembelajaran [Pustaka]
		Indikator (3)	Kriteria & Bentuk (4)	Luring (offline) (5)	Daring (online) (6)	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1	1. Menjelaskan kontrak kuliah. 2. Menentukan outcome pembelajaran materi selama perkuliahan	1. Pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap proses pembelajaran serta ketentuan yang diatur selama satu semester 2. Ketepatan dalam membuat outcome yang akan dicapai setelah perkuliahan.	1. Ketepatan dalam membuat outcome yang akan dicapai setelah perkuliahan.	1. Ceramah, tanya jawab. 2. TM 1 Mg (2 sks x 50 menit) 4. Tugas: Memperbaiki Kembali outcome yang diinginkan.	1. Mengumpulkan hasil penentuan outcome ke Aplikasi JAMBOARD (melalui link yang telah disediakan dosen)	1. Introduction to NLP concept. 2. Basic action of NLP. 3. Help students identify what they really want (outcome) - (Revell & Norman 1997:43-46) - Brown, H. D. (2004) 4. NLP The Path of Excellence (Yuliawan T.P., 2022)
2	1. Mengidentifikasi good relationship and bad relationship,	1. Ketepatan dalam mempraktekan <i>Raport Building</i> . 2. Mengidentifikasi good relationship and bad relationship,	3. Ketepatan dalam Menggunakan I (really) dislike/like + present simple ... or I liked/didn't like ... + past simple.	- Praktek berpasangan	- Mengumpulkan hasil sharing Bersama teman	1. Introduction to NLP concept. 2. Basic action of NLP. 3. Help students identify what they really want (outcome) - (Revell & Norman 1997:43-46) - Brown, H. D. (2004) 4. NLP The Path of Excellence (Yuliawan T.P., 2022)
3	Mempraktekan <i>Raport building</i> <i>Language Focus:</i> I (really) dislike/like + present simple ... or I liked/didn't like ... + past simple.	Ketepatan Dalam mempraktekan <i>Raport Building</i>	4. Menggunakan I (really) dislike/like + present simple ... or I liked/didn't like ... + past simple.	- Praktek berpasangan	- Mengumpulkan hasil sharing Bersama teman	4. Introduction to NLP concept. 5. Basic action of NLP. 6. Help students identify what they really want (outcome) - (Revell & Norman 1997:43-46) - Brown, H. D. (2004) 4. NLP The Path of Excellence (Yuliawan T.P., 2022)

Figure 3. Example of Lesson Plan Document

The lecturer emphasized, selecting appropriate NLP techniques and aligning them with speaking objectives is not instant. An additional difficulty emerged during outcome setting. Most students initially formulated very general goals, such as “improve English speaking skill,” which lacked specificity and measurability. To address this, the lecturer explicitly introduced six speaking components, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and confidence, to guide students in refining their outcomes. Although Google Jamboard helped visualize and document students’ goals, the lecturer still needed to invest extra instructional time to ensure that students understood how

their outcomes related to NLP-based activities. This challenge highlights the cognitive and administrative burden placed on lecturers when implementing innovative frameworks like NLP.

This challenge is consistent with Shulman's (2013) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge, which emphasises the integration of subject matter expertise with appropriate teaching strategies. In this context, lecturers must move beyond content delivery by incorporating NLP techniques into communicative activities in ways that are contextually meaningful. From an ethnographic perspective, the complexity of instructional design in this context cannot be fully understood without attending to the specific cultural and institutional conditions of UIN Saizu Purwokerto as a site of practice. As an Islamic state university, the institution operates within a curriculum framework that emphasises the integration of Islamic values with academic content, which places additional expectations on lecturers to ensure that instructional materials and activities are not only pedagogically sound but also culturally and religiously appropriate. The lecturer's selection of culturally familiar topics such as *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations as speaking themes reflects a deliberate act of cultural contextualisation, an adaptive strategy that is characteristic of ethnographically situated teaching practice.

Revell and Norman (1997) similarly emphasise that the effectiveness of NLP depends largely on lecturers' capacity to contextualise these techniques. The present study extends this perspective by positioning lecturers as adaptive designers who actively construct meaningful learning experiences, rather than merely applying predefined instructional methods. Given that NLP techniques were not originally developed for Indonesian EFL classroom contexts, lecturers cannot apply them directly without undertaking substantial adaptations. This, consequently, positions lecturers not merely as deliverers of content, but as active instructional designers who construct meaningful and purposeful learning experiences for their students.

3.2 Conceptual Comprehension Barriers

One of the most fundamental challenges encountered during the implementation concerned students' difficulty in grasping the abstract and unfamiliar theoretical foundations of NLP. Concepts such as Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic, Olfactory, and Gustatory sensory channels (VAKOG) and the NLP Communication Model were entirely new to most students, who had previously experienced speaking instruction dominated by drill-based or task-based activities without explicit cognitive or psychological frameworks. During the interview session, the lecturer reflected on this difficulty:

"This strategy was still very new to them, so when I explained the concept of NLP, which was still a basic understanding for them, it seemed they had difficulty, and finally I had to repeat it again at the next meeting." (Interview with lecturer, August 11, 2024).

This account reveals a gap between the conceptual complexity of NLP and students' cognitive readiness, necessitating a process of gradual adaptation and reinforcement through repeated explanation. This difficulty was corroborated by classroom observation

data. In Meeting 4, observation notes recorded that:

Several students displayed confused facial expressions and whispered to their peers during the lecturer's explanation of the NLP definition and sensory channels. (observation note meeting 4)

Although the lecturer provided verbal explanations and contextual examples, many students struggled to conceptualise how sensory preferences influence language processing and speaking performance. When asked directly, one student responded:

"I do not fully understand yet; this is the first time I have heard about it" (Observation, Meeting 4).

This confusion was further echoed in students' written reflections. Student SR wrote:

"The lecturer introduced to us five sensory channels... However, I still feel confused with the explanation given. Hopefully, the next meeting will get a more detailed explanation" (SR, Self-reflection, Meeting 4).

In response, the lecturer attempted to simplify explanations by linking sensory channels to students' everyday experiences, such as learning preferences through videos, music, or physical activity. Comprehension developed gradually rather than immediately. By Meeting 5, following the introduction of the NLP Communication Model through videos and personal experience-sharing activities, student AN reflected:

"Initially confusing, but after it was well explained, finally I could understand it" (AN, Reflection, Meeting 5).

These findings suggest that NLP's conceptual density requires repeated exposure, scaffolding, and contextualisation, particularly in EFL contexts where learners are more accustomed to procedural rather than metacognitive instructional approaches.

This challenge can be explained through Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasises the importance of scaffolding in facilitating higher-order understanding. The need for repeated explanations in this study indicates that learners were still at an early stage of engaging with metacognitive frameworks, which aligns with (Rayati, 2021), who found that even trained EFL instructors required sustained engagement with NLP concepts before achieving a working understanding suggesting that the conceptual demands of NLP are inherently steep regardless of the learner's background. This is further supported by (Zhang et al., 2023), who demonstrated that meaningful NLP-based gains in critical thinking and academic achievement among EFL learners only emerged after twelve sessions of strategic training, indicating that conceptual internalisation of NLP is necessarily a gradual process that cannot be accelerated without adequate scaffolding. NLP-based instruction therefore demands the application of structured and gradual scaffolding in EFL speaking classrooms. EFL lecturers cannot assume students' cognitive readiness to immediately comprehend the theoretical frameworks underlying NLP, given that concepts such as Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic, Olfactory, and Gustatory (VAKOG) sensory channels and the NLP Communication Model are abstract and unfamiliar to students who are accustomed to drill-based or task-based approaches. Therefore, lecturers need to design

a stepwise conceptual introduction by employing contextually relevant media, connecting abstract concepts to students' everyday experiences, and refraining from advancing to the practical stage before students have genuinely internalised the underlying theoretical foundations.

Ethnographically, students' difficulty in grasping NLP concepts reflects a deeper cultural pattern embedded in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The students in this study had been socialised into a predominantly teacher-centred and procedural mode of learning, in which the lecturer transmits knowledge while students receive and reproduce it. Indonesian educational culture is characterised by a strong hierarchical orientation, wherein lecturers are positioned as the primary authority and source of knowledge, and students are generally unaccustomed to taking initiative or assuming responsibility for their own learning (Susanti et al., 2023). This cultural condition renders the demands of NLP, which require self-awareness, metacognitive reflection, and active student engagement in the learning process, fundamentally unfamiliar and cognitively disorienting for most students. This cultural mismatch between students' habituated learning dispositions and the metacognitive demands of NLP represents a contextually specific comprehension barrier that goes beyond mere cognitive unfamiliarity with new content.

3.3 Time Constraints

Time management emerged as a persistent structural challenge throughout the implementation. Although the course comprised 18 meetings, NLP-based instruction demanded significantly more time than conventional speaking lessons due to its multi-layered structure, which typically included theoretical explanation, demonstration, guided practice, independent speaking tasks, and reflective discussion within a single session. The lecturer described this tension explicitly:

“During classroom implementation, I felt that time was very limited, so feedback activities, for example, could not be carried out optimally, especially in classes with a large number of students. In addition, NLP requires awareness, reflection, and practice. If students do not understand the concept, we cannot directly move to speaking activities. This situation affects time allocation” (Interview with lecturer, August 11, 2024).

Students' reflection underscores a recurring structural tension in NLP-based EFL instruction, wherein the multi-stage nature of each lesson spanning conceptual introduction, modelling, and guided practice consistently competed with the limited time available within each scheduled session. Because NLP activities require learners to internalise abstract frameworks before engaging in communicative practice, time for actual speaking was frequently curtailed by earlier instructional stages. This not only reduced students' opportunities for sustained oral production, but also impeded the cumulative skill development that effective speaking instruction requires. The lecturer's observation thus reveals that time constraint in this context is not merely a logistical inconvenience, but a structural impediment rooted in the inherent complexity of NLP as

a pedagogical framework.

"I need a lot of time for speaking practice in every meeting, but sometimes the allocated class time is simply not sufficient." (SM, Self-reflection in meeting 7).

Classroom observations further substantiated this finding. When students failed to fully comprehend an NLP concept, the lecturer was required to revisit explanations, thereby reducing the time available for speaking practice. In Meeting 6, for instance, nearly half of the session was devoted to re-explaining VAKOG using gestures, illustrations, and repeated examples. Observation notes recorded:

"The lecturer repeatedly re-explained the sensory channels because several students asked similar questions. As a result, the speaking practice session was shorter than planned" (Observation note, Meeting 6).

These findings reflect a structural tension between conceptual understanding and oral practice, which compelled the lecturer to continuously negotiate instructional priorities within limited classroom time. This challenge is well-explained through Sweller's (1988) Cognitive Load Theory, which posits that the multi-layered nature of NLP instruction—combining conceptual explanation, practice, and reflection places substantial cognitive demands on learners and requires extended instructional time. Similarly Rayati (2021) notes that sufficient time is essential for both understanding and applying NLP concepts in communicative contexts. Accordingly, time should not be treated merely as a logistical constraint but as a critical pedagogical variable that directly influences the effectiveness of NLP-based instruction.

Pedagogically, EFL instructors cannot assume students' cognitive readiness to comprehend NLP theoretical frameworks; therefore, structured scaffolding strategies and the use of contextual media are essential prerequisites before progressing to practical speaking activities. Lesson plan design also needs to be restructured to ensure that each instructional stage particularly reflection and feedback receives proportional time allocation, given that time constraints have been shown to compromise the quality of speaking practice.

From an ethnographic standpoint, the time constraint challenge in this study is inseparable from the broader institutional rhythm of UIN Saizu Purwokerto. The academic calendar, credit-hour system, and examination schedule of the institution collectively impose structural boundaries on instructional time that the lecturer was unable to negotiate unilaterally. These culturally situated temporal dynamics, which are rarely captured in experimental or survey-based research designs, were only made visible through sustained ethnographic observation across an entire semester. They suggest that time constraint in NLP-based EFL instruction in Indonesian contexts is not simply a matter of lesson planning or curriculum design, but is embedded in the cultural temporality of the institutional setting itself, a finding that has significant implications for how future NLP implementation studies conceptualise and address this challenge.

3.4 Linguistic Challenges

The fourth challenge perceived by the lecturer concerned the difficulty of managing students' persistent linguistic weaknesses during speaking practice. These weaknesses were particularly evident in three areas: grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary selection. Such difficulties became especially pronounced within the constraints of NLP-based instruction, where time and pedagogical priorities often limited opportunities for systematic linguistic correction. The lecturer acknowledged these challenges, noting:

"There were still grammatical errors made by students, which I could not deny. Similarly, pronunciation and word choice remained challenges when they practised speaking. I did provide feedback; however, it was not optimal due to time constraints. In my opinion, this issue was very crucial" (Interview with lecturer, August 11, 2024).

This account reveals that despite the lecturer's awareness of students' linguistic weaknesses, the structural constraints of NLP-based instruction particularly limited time for feedback prevented systematic corrective intervention. The lecturer's recognition of this gap as "very crucial" further underscores the tension between NLP's affective priorities and the linguistic demands of speaking development.

Observation data from Meeting 14 similarly documented that,

"During the speaking activities, some students still made grammatical errors and misused vocabulary, and it was not possible to correct all of them due to time limitations" (Observation note, Meeting 14).

These findings suggest that while NLP techniques may have contributed to a reduction in speaking anxiety and an increase in students' willingness to communicate, they did not automatically produce corresponding improvements in linguistic accuracy.

This finding is consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional and psychological factors influence language acquisition. While NLP appears to lower the affective filter by reducing anxiety and enhancing confidence, the development of grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary still depends on sustained linguistic practice and systematic corrective feedback. Tosey and Mathison (2010) further argue that NLP primarily supports the affective dimensions of language learning rather than directly promoting linguistic improvement. These findings are also consistent with the results of studies conducted by Normawati et al. (2023), Franscy & Ramli (2022), Zafa et al. (2023), Khasinah et al. (2024), Mustafari et al. (2022), and Murti et al. (2022), all of which suggest that affective and linguistic development should be addressed as complementary yet distinct dimensions of EFL speaking instruction.

These findings underscore that NLP-based instruction should not be positioned as a standalone approach to speaking development, but rather as a complementary framework that addresses the affective dimensions of language learning. Since NLP techniques effectively lower students' affective filter by reducing anxiety and building confidence, they create a psychologically conducive environment for communication;

however, this affective readiness does not automatically translate into linguistic accuracy. Consequently, EFL instructors need to deliberately integrate systematic corrective feedback mechanisms such as focused form instruction, recasts, and structured peer correction alongside NLP techniques to ensure that grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary development receive adequate instructional attention.

From an ethnographic perspective, the linguistic challenges identified in this study should be understood within the broader social and cultural context in which learning takes place. At UIN Saizu Purwokerto, English is a foreign language in the truest sense, as it is not used as a medium of instruction outside the English Department and students have limited exposure to authentic English communication in their everyday lives. This sociolinguistic reality creates a substantial gap between students' existing linguistic competence and the communicative demands imposed by NLP-based speaking activities.

3.5 Reflective Evaluation Difficulties

The fifth and final challenge concerned the evaluation of student learning within an NLP-based instructional framework. The lecturer explained:

“Evaluation in the context of NLP focuses on students’ reflections on their learning development. However, reflection alone is insufficient as it mainly captures subjective and affective aspects. Therefore, structured rubric-based speaking tests are needed to ensure a more comprehensive and objective assessment, allowing both internal changes and actual speaking performance to be measured systematically” (Interview with lecturer, August 11, 2024).

Document analysis revealed that although lesson plans integrated NLP techniques throughout, formal assessment rubrics continued to prioritise measurable linguistic components, including fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. This reflects an inherent tension between the predominantly affective and introspective orientation of NLP evaluation and the objective, product-oriented requirements of institutional assessment frameworks. To address this limitation, the lecturer combined reflective self-evaluation with structured rubric-based speaking assessments, thereby balancing the internal and experiential dimensions of NLP with the measurable outcomes required for formal reporting.

This approach is supported by Farrell (2022) who emphasises the importance of integrating both reflective and measurable evaluation methods to produce comprehensive and accountable assessments of learning. Similarly, Fraga & Bobadilla (2025) demonstrated that self-assessment with rubrics significantly enhanced students' metacognitive awareness of their own learning process, affirming that structured rubrics and reflective activities are functionally complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Gabriela et al. (2023) combined reflective journals with rubric-based assessment in an EFL context and found that both instruments together provided a more comprehensive account of learners' development than either method alone. Alshaye (2024) further confirmed that integrating reflective models with structured assessment enhanced both self-assessment accuracy and linguistic communication skills among EFL practitioners. The present study reinforces this view by demonstrating that relying exclusively on

reflection captures only the subjective and affective dimensions of NLP learning, while a hybrid evaluation framework enables a more systematic and valid account of students' speaking development.

These findings highlight that assessment within NLP-based EFL instruction must move beyond reflective self-evaluation toward a hybrid framework that integrates both affective and linguistic dimensions of speaking performance. Since NLP evaluation inherently emphasises subjective and introspective processes, relying solely on student reflection risks producing an incomplete and potentially biased account of learning outcomes. EFL instructors therefore need to deliberately design assessment systems that accommodate both the internal, experiential gains fostered by NLP such as reduced anxiety, heightened sensory awareness, and increased communicative confidence and the objectively measurable linguistic competencies required by institutional frameworks. This implication directly strengthens the Evaluation phase, affirming that rubric-based speaking assessments and structured reflective tasks are not mutually exclusive but rather functionally interdependent components of a comprehensive and accountable evaluation system.

Ethnographically, the evaluative challenge documented in this study reflects a deeper cultural pattern in Indonesian education, where assessment has historically been conceived as an external, authoritative judgement rendered by the teacher rather than an internal, self-directed process. This cultural orientation explains why the lecturer found it necessary to complement NLP's reflective evaluation with rubric-based assessments, institutional dominance of formal, externally structured evaluation left students with limited experience of self-directed meaning-making, rendering reflection alone an insufficient measure of learning. The tension between NLP's introspective orientation and institutional assessment requirements is therefore not merely a design problem, but a culturally embedded challenge rooted in the mismatch between NLP's epistemological assumption that learners are the primary evaluators of their own development, and the assessment culture of Indonesian higher education, where evaluative authority has traditionally resided with the institution. This ethnographic insight reveals that the evaluative tensions documented in this study are not incidental to the implementation context they are constitutive of it, and can only be fully understood by attending to the culturally situated assumptions about knowledge, authority, and accountability that shape assessment practices in Indonesian higher education.

4. Conclusion

This study identified five interconnected challenges in implementing NLP in EFL speaking instruction at UIN Saizu Purwokerto: instructional design complexity, conceptual comprehension barriers, time constraints, linguistic challenges, and reflective evaluation difficulties. These findings collectively demonstrate that NLP demands substantial pedagogical expertise, contextual adaptation, and institutional support, as affective gains do not automatically translate into linguistic accuracy and NLP's reflective

orientation conflicts with formal assessment requirements. This study therefore reconceptualises NLP as an instructionally demanding and contextually grounded framework rather than a universally applicable method.

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the study relied on a single lecturer as the primary informant, which means that the challenges identified are necessarily filtered through one practitioner's experience, perspective, and level of NLP competency. The findings may therefore not fully represent the range of implementation challenges encountered by other NLP practitioners who differ in terms of training background, teaching experience, or institutional affiliation. Second, the study was conducted within a single institutional context the English Language Education Department (*Tadris Bahasa Inggris*) at UIN Saizu Purwokerto, which limits the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other institutional settings, whether within or beyond the Indonesian higher education landscape. Third, as an ethnographic inquiry, this study prioritises contextual depth and emic understanding over breadth and statistical generalisability. The findings are therefore not intended to be generalised to broader populations of NLP practitioners or EFL classrooms, but rather to offer a richly contextualised account of implementation challenges that may resonate with or inform practitioners in similarly situated contexts. Future research should address these limitations by engaging multiple NLP practitioners across diverse institutional settings, employing comparative or multi-site ethnographic designs, and incorporating longer observational periods to capture the longitudinal dynamics of NLP integration in EFL speaking instruction.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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