

## EXPLORING ENGLISH TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING SPEAKING

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### Article History

Received:  
January 17, 2024  
Revised:  
January 31, 2024  
Accepted:  
February 28, 2024  
Published:  
March 14, 2024

### Abstract

Speaking is an essential part of mastering any language, including English. However, teaching speaking often poses various difficulties and obstacles for teachers. This research aimed to investigate the difficulties English teachers face when teaching speaking skills in the classroom. The study utilized a qualitative case study approach, collecting data through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with eight teacher participants who all taught the same grade level at different schools. The findings revealed five major difficulties: 1) teachers' lack of vocabulary; 2) students' lack of motivation and student anxiety; 3) insufficient school facilities and equipment; 4) curriculum used. This shows that problems arise from multiple factors, not just one, and solutions are needed to minimize these difficulties.

**Keywords:** *English Speaking, English Teachers Teaching Speaking, Speaking Skills, Teachers' Difficulties*

### Introduction

The difficulty of teachers in teaching speaking in class is still a matter of debate in the world of education. Speaking is the most important skill that all language learners must master. According to Chaney (1998) quoted in (Batang, 2016), speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols, in various contexts. By speaking people can communicate with each other and identify what kind of situation in the world. People who have speaking ability either learners or teachers will be better at sending and receiving messages or information to others. Generally, the purpose of teaching speaking is to increase students' oral production. But in fact, not acquiring English as the mother tongue or L1 makes it difficult for the EFL teachers to convey the message to the students.

Since English is rarely used in daily communication in Indonesia, speaking English poses quite a challenge for Indonesian students. While teachers may have

proficiency in English, and students may study it in school, English remains a foreign language for Indonesians rather than a widely-spoken mother tongue. As such, Indonesian students require extensive time and effort to learn and become adept at using spoken English skills properly (Dalimunthe et al., 2018). Unfortunately, in Indonesian schools, the four core English language skills - reading, writing, listening, and speaking - are combined into one general English subject. Among these skills, speaking is often seen as the most essential, Indonesian English learners frequently view fluid speaking ability as an indicator of successful English acquisition overall. Thus, researchers sought to examine the difficulties faced by teachers in teaching English, focusing specifically on investigating the difficulties of teaching speaking to Indonesian students in light of the foreign language status and limited real-world practice opportunities.

Teaching speaking in general is very challenging for teachers because teachers need to fully guide students to speak in a good way; and emphasize accuracy, pronunciation, content, etc. (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019 Yusuf & Zuraini, 2016). This also becomes difficult if speaking teaching is done to teach a language that they do not accept as their mother tongue. In reality, learning language is not only about theory but also learning how to practice it in real communication, as the function of language (Dalimunthe et al., 2018). It means that when someone wants to master a language, let alone master the skill of speaking that language, they must combine theory with practicing it as often as possible, just as if they are going to teach speaking in another language, the teacher must first master it. Because students do not master English as a mother tongue, teachers often have difficulty transferring English to those who do not master aspects of speaking competence such as mastery of vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse competence, social competence, etc.

The speaking aspect needs to be mastered in order to be able to speak another language. Apart from the basic aspects as explained above, another important element that must be mastered is how to articulate sounds that are easy to understand, requiring adequate vocabulary and mastery of syntax (Dalimunthe, 2014). Furthermore, he concluded that these various elements add to linguistic competence.

However, although linguistic competence is necessary, it is not sufficient for someone who wants to communicate competently in another language. Therefore, it can be concluded that to communicate competently, linguistic competence alone is not enough, there are other elements that need to be mastered. This is reinforced by Savignon's theory, which states that communicative competence is dynamic, relative, context-specific, and applies to both written and spoken language, as well as spoken language, and many other symbolic systems. This view is different from the previous one, it emphasizes more on the understanding that communicative competence is influenced by the fields of pragmatics and philosophy of language regarding speech acts but the two are still related and intertwined in one process. Thus, it can be concluded that communication competence is needed to speak another language, in the context of teaching speaking it is also unavoidable that this is necessary, someone who can speak fluently and confidently in public is often said to be someone who has communication competence and this is also of course a teacher must have it.

Apart from communication competence, in teaching speaking before knowing what difficulties occur, it is necessary to know the types of speaking in this case. According to Brown (2004) quoted in (Dalimunthe et al., 2018), there are five basic types of speaking, namely imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive. Imitative speaking is the ability to imitate a word or phrase or perhaps a sentence. Intensive speaking goes beyond one step of imitation to include any speaking performance designed to practice some phonological and grammatical aspects of the language. Responsive is interaction at a rather limited level in the form of very short conversations, standard greetings, and small talk, simple comments and requests, and the like. Interactive speaking; complex interactions that sometimes include multiple exchanges and/or multiple participants. Extensive speaking is oral production, including speeches, oral presentations, and storytelling

However, the difficulties of teaching speaking are still debated in the world of education, it cannot be denied that difficulties in teaching speaking are very urgent and important to research for the smooth learning of speaking. Previous research has revealed several different results regarding difficulties in teaching speaking.

(Thornbury, 2005) states that basically, learner-speakers face two main areas of difficulty, namely knowledge factors and skill factors which influence other factors such as lack of self-confidence or self-awareness. Meanwhile, (Widiastuti et al., 2020) and (Sardi et al., 2017) stated that some difficulties that occur are guiding content development, increasing student accuracy, providing media to create a pleasant learning climate, preventing errors in word pronunciation, and other difficulties that are truly specific within a special scope. The benefit of conducting research regarding teachers' difficulties in teaching speaking is of course to serve as a reference regarding the things that make it difficult for teachers to teach speaking so that in the future, they can do it better.

Although many previous researchers have examined speaking teaching, most of those who investigated were teachers whose teaching was poor, and only a few discussed that in teaching speaking these difficulties could be brought about by the students themselves. But in fact, according to (Wicaksono, 2016) one of the difficulties often experienced is when teachers and students cannot speak English effectively so what the teacher says and what the students answer or do is out of context, even though the aim of teaching speaking skills is communicative efficiency,. Therefore, this research was deliberately carried out to increase understanding and increase pre-existing knowledge regarding the difficulties experienced by teachers during the process of teaching speaking, thereby producing a more comprehensive understanding of what difficulties teachers may experience in teaching speaking. The main aim of this research is to show the types of difficulties teachers face in teaching speaking to EFL students with teachers who also have an EFL background, as well as the factors that influence these difficulties, and explore the efforts made by teachers in overcoming these difficulties. For this, we ultimately ask critical research questions such as the following:

1. What difficulties are faced by English teachers in teaching speaking?
2. How are the difficulties happening in teaching speaking?
3. What efforts are made by English teachers to overcome the problem?

## Method

The research design that achieved these results was a case study, which begins with an interpretive case explanation regarding the teacher's task in teaching speaking to EFL students. According to Creswell (2014), a case study is a research strategy that involves thoroughly examining a specific case or instance by gathering comprehensive data through various data collection procedures.

The instruments for this research are statements from participant interviews and questionnaires. The source of the data obtained were EFL teachers who taught English in high schools. The researcher has a reason to use English teachers as respondents because this research truly examines the difficulties faced by teachers according to the title chosen by the researcher, namely teaching speaking, it is appropriate for English teachers to be used as respondents here.

In collecting data, researchers used structured interviews and questionnaires. A structured interview is a tool used to collect data about opinions, beliefs, and feelings about a situation from participants. According to Creswell (2012: 382), a questionnaire is a type of survey design that participants fill out and return to the researcher. As a result, participants chose to answer the questions and were willing to provide basic personal or demographic information.

This data analysis used descriptive analysis. The data analysis technique called descriptive analysis aims to provide researchers with a general description of the data they will collect (Creswell, 2014). In addition, researchers combine and compile primary data from various participants. Data reduction, data presentation, and data analysis are three processes in the analysis process.

## Results

### ***The Difficulties Faced by English Teachers in Teaching Speaking***

The results of interviews with teachers who instruct speaking skills in the classroom are presented in these findings. The data indicates that teachers lack sufficient vocabulary to make their English proficient. Additionally, there is a lack of motivation among students to learn speaking skills in the classroom environment.

Table 1

Teacher	Difficulties
Teacher 1	<i>"As a person who acquires English not as a mother tongue, so, often the difficulty when teaching speaking is the lack of English vocabulary."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"Teaching speaking becomes difficult because of the lack of vocabulary so it is not optimal."</i>

Based on interviews conducted, the majority of respondents said the top difficulty English teachers face when teaching speaking is their lack of vocabulary. As seen in Table 1, respondents said teachers are often not able to teach speaking optimally because their vocabulary is limited.

Table 2

Teacher	Difficulties
Teacher 1	<i>"Students' motivation to speak English is lacking because they think English is not very important"</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"Students have very minimal motivation to speak English"</i>

After teachers talked about the difficulties of teaching speaking skills in the classroom, the researchers made a questionnaire for different participants. The goal was to categorize the most common difficulties in teaching speaking, whether caused by teachers, students, or external factors. The researchers also wanted to identify the difficulties teachers face most often when teaching speaking

Table 3

Respondents	Students Motivation	Strategies Used	School Facility	Students Anxiety	Curriculum Used
#R1	✓	✓		✓	✓
#R2	✓			✓	
#R3		✓	✓		✓

#R4	✓	✓		✓	
#R5	✓		✓	✓	
#R6	✓		✓		

As seen in Table 3, the top three difficulties teachers reported were: 1) students' lack of motivation; 2) students' anxiety; and 3) curriculum curriculum. Other factors like school facilities and teaching strategies were equally challenging.

### ***The Efforts by English Teachers to Overcome the Problem***

Apart from the difficulties experienced by teachers when teaching speaking in class, researchers also identified solutions to overcome these various difficulties from the results of interviews conducted with English teachers as follows:

Table 4

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Solution</b>
Teacher 1	<i>"Because vocabulary influences speaking, the best solution is to add basic English vocabulary and get used to speaking English with the vocabulary you already know."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"Usually, to increase my English vocabulary, I read a lot of English texts, listen to music, and practice English in my daily life."</i>

Teacher 1 emphasized the importance of vocabulary acquisition in improving students' English speaking fluency. Their solution was to consistently introduce new vocabulary and have students actively learn new words. Teacher 2 advocated using English media extensively - listening to music, reading texts, speaking practice daily - to build fluency. Looking at both findings, we can conclude that a combination of actively expanding vocabulary knowledge along with immersion in English media can enhance students' fluency in spoken English. The solutions are complementary - vocabulary building provides the content needed to understand and speak English, while constant exposure and practice with media improves comfort and flow in actual speech. By blending vocabulary learning with English media immersion, students can most effectively improve their conversational fluency in the English language. The findings from the two teachers reinforce one another and point to this dual approach.

Table 5

Teacher	Solution
Teacher 1	<i>"Lack of students' motivation is a difficulty we experience as teachers, so sometimes the strategy I use to overcome this is forcing them to like English, sometimes I add media that I prepare myself to make the learning atmosphere less monotonous."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"Usually, to make them motivated to learn English, I usually use media and apply strategies that suit their needs so that they don't get bored and they feel interested in learning speaking."</i>

According to Table 4, Teacher 1 believes that to increase students' motivation for learning speaking, they should be forced to participate and media should be prepared for them to use. Teacher 2 agrees with using media as a strategy to overcome students' low motivation for learning speaking. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 mentioned using media as a way to improve students' motivation to learn speaking skills.

## Discussion

### ***The Difficulties Faced by English Teachers in Teaching Speaking***

Research indicates that one of the primary obstacles for teachers is their lack of vocabulary when speaking. Oxford (1990) explained that vocabulary acquisition represents the most difficult yet essential aspect of language learning due to the sheer number of words that exist. Vocabulary is viewed as a fundamental component enabling oral and written communication between individuals using any given language. However, insufficient vocabulary mastery poses a major barrier to effective communication for both second-language and foreign-language teachers and learners. Limited vocabulary proficiency hinders teachers' and learners' fluency and comprehensibility when expressing themselves in writing or speaking. As such, building learners' vocabulary represents a critical area of focus to facilitate clearer and more natural linguistic exchange.



Vocabulary acquisition constitutes the cornerstone when learning any new language. However, true vocabulary uptake necessitates active engagement from both teachers and students within the learning process. If instructors and pupils do not collaboratively participate in activating new lexical knowledge, retention remains unlikely. For input to convert into intake, the introduced vocabulary must attain comprehensibility. Since output production similarly relies on processed input and firmly-grasped intake, quality exposure and conveyed linguistic information require emphasis when presenting new words. Teachers must prioritize helpful contextualization, student comprehension checks, usage demonstrations, and reinforcement activities to enable robust encoding of novel vocabulary into memory. Success in vocabulary instruction further depends on learner attentiveness and willingness to encounter unfamiliar terms in meaningful passages, apply them in speaking and writing attempts, and commit their definitions to remembrance through engaging rehearsal. By directing joint efforts towards these fundamental encoding mechanisms, teachers and students can maximize intake, output, and long-term retention of new vocabulary knowledge. Researchers such as Gu (2003), Marion (2008), Susanto (2016), and Nation (2001) quoted in (Susanto, 2017) have emphasized that building vocabulary represents a fundamental component of foreign language mastery. A robust lexicon allows learners to produce coherent spoken and written communication. As Nation (2001) highlights, vocabulary acquisition plays an integral role across all language modalities, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without a critical threshold of familiar terms and expressions, skills like listening comprehension, conversational fluency, literary analysis, and composition drafting face substantial impediments. Given vocabulary's widespread relevance for language usage and text creation, an array of scholars underscore the importance of vocabulary breadth for enabling key aspects of linguistic competence. Their insights speak to the overarching significance of vocabulary not merely as isolated words but as building blocks that allow foreign language learners to access full comprehension and articulate complete ideas.

Researchers also discovered students' lack of motivation was a major factor in making it hard for teachers to instruct speaking skills. As (Ellis, 1986) noted, student motivation and needs are central to language acquisition. Findings showed teachers found students' lack of motivation highly influential in the difficulty of teaching speaking. This suggests students lack the drive to learn speaking, potentially viewing English as unimportant or unnecessary as a non-native language. However, motivation is critical and students need intrinsic motivation to optimize learning, as Saputra et al. indicated - student motivation positively impacts learning gains. Overall, the research highlighted that students' lack of motivation for speaking English impaired teachers' ability to provide effective instruction. It underscores the importance of stimulating students' internal motivation to achieve proficiency in speaking English.

### ***The Difficulties Happening in Teaching Speaking***

In the researchers' findings, the difficulties experienced by teachers when teaching speaking came from four sources: teachers, students, facilities, and systems. These findings are in line with research conducted by Imam, (2016). The study found that difficulties in teaching speaking in the classroom were influenced by (1) students such as students' lack of motivation/interest, (2) learning materials and learning strategies, and (3) media such as facilities to assist the learning process. Teachers encountered five specific difficulties in teaching speaking: students' lack of motivation, teaching strategies used, school facility, student anxiety, and curriculum. Both lack of motivation and anxiety stem internally from students. Lack of student motivation and student anxiety are problems that both originate from within the student. This affects speaking learning because motivation greatly influences students' development in learning. This is in line with (Putri, 2016) who states that these factors heavily influence speaking acquisition, as motivation is critical for learners to develop new language proficiency. Likewise, anxiety is related to feelings of tension, worry, and nervousness related to foreign language learning situations (Horwitz et al. quoted in Nascente, 2001). Anxiety is a psychological factor experienced by students and this plays an important role in student learning which is also shared by other researchers such as Horwitz (1991) as quoted in (Tiono & Sylvia, 2004). Speaking anxiety is a

common difficulty students face when speaking in a foreign language (Pohan & Nany Kusumawardany, 2023). This means that anxiety about speaking a particular language can affect students' performance and quality in language production. In summary, the research showed that student-related difficulties of motivation and anxiety created major obstacles for teachers in effective speaking instruction, as psychological factors impacted students' language production quality and development.

The third is teacher strategies, namely difficulties brought by teachers. Researchers found that even though teachers have determined strategies for teaching speaking, sometimes these strategies do not suit students' needs and that is what causes difficulties for them. As (Dalimunthe et al., 2018) discussed, for students to engage in learning speaking, teachers must utilize suitable approaches, methods, and strategies that align with student interests and needs. This indicates teacher strategies cannot be haphazard but should consider critical aspects to be effective. This is also in line with (Ali & Ismail, 2023) since because students do not use English regularly in everyday life, teachers need to continue to look for new ways to help students develop strong speaking skills in the classroom environment. It is common for teachers to continually modify their instructional strategies until finding ones that fit their students. Overall, the research showed teacher strategies could create difficulties if they did not resonate with students, underscoring the importance of teachers selecting and adapting strategies that motivate student speaking engagement. Since the students don't use English regularly in everyday life, teachers need to keep finding new ways to help students develop strong oral proficiency in the classroom environment.

Two major difficulties teachers face when teaching speaking are inadequate school facilities and frequently changing curriculum. While these issues may seem similar, they have distinct impacts. Research shows that poor facilities directly limit English language instruction, including speaking skills. As (Arsyad, 2003) notes, robust learning facilities motivate and engage students. Thus, it means that facilities do not just enable teaching, but encourage student enthusiasm and participation. Data from the questionnaire results further show that the current curriculum is one of the factors that make it difficult for teachers to teach English as a second language because

curriculum changes often make them change the existing learning system, even though there are still many students who don't even speak English. base. The facts that existed when the researchers conducted the research were also very surprising, where in one school different grade levels also had different curriculum, this also made learning activities not conducive because talking about the curriculum of course there are aspects to it. As (Graves & Garton, 2017) explains, the curriculum encompasses planning, implementation, and evaluation. Frequent curriculum changes destabilize the educational system, causing small and large disruptions. This means that the curriculum has certain provisions, but it does not rule out the possibility that if the curriculum continues to change, the education system will also change, these changes can have small or large impacts. In line with this, (Mulyani, 2018) also stated that language teachers as catalysts for change in the education system are required not only to accept the curriculum that has been designed by the government but also to take part by providing critical thoughts and opinions regarding concepts and their implementation in schools. Therefore, language teachers must not only adapt to the new curriculum but also critically evaluate concepts and implementation. While teachers aim to be flexible, frequent curriculum changes can be burdensome. Improved facilities and curricular stability would support quality English language speaking.

### ***The Efforts by English Teachers to Overcome the Problem***

Teachers face many difficulties when teaching speaking skills, but they have strategies to address these difficulties. Research shows the main issues are students' limited vocabulary and lack of motivation. Teachers try to build students' vocabulary since fluent speakers have a large vocabulary. They also frequently practice new and already learned words. This repetition is crucial, so students retain what they learn instead of forgetting the material. Overall, teachers aim to expand students' vocabulary and provide repeated practice to improve speaking skills, despite the difficulties. As Nation (2001) stated, developing language skills and increasing vocabulary size are interconnected processes that depend on each other. Practicing language strengthens vocabulary, and knowing more words facilitates language use.

Continuously adding to one's vocabulary and applying it through language use are critical for ongoing development.

The second solution is to engage in a learning battle with the right media and strategies to increase motivation to learn speaking. Students may not be enthusiastic or eager to practice speaking skills in class. Their disinterest and disengagement make it challenging for teachers to get them to actively participate and improve their oral abilities. Thus, the teacher's role is crucial in motivating students, since motivation refers to internal drives to be active and put in effort to achieve goals. Without motivation, students won't practice enough to become fluent. Teachers must explicitly show how learning links to students' future interests and goals. Students can also become discouraged if academic challenges seem too difficult. Therefore, teachers need to motivate students and show the relevance of speaking skills to overcome apathy and reluctance to practice. With the right techniques and linkage to real-world outcomes, teachers can turn the learning battle into an engaging experience for students.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this research explored the difficulties teachers face when teaching speaking and the efforts they make to overcome these difficulties. The findings indicate five main problems: 1) teachers' limited vocabulary; 2) students' lack of motivation & student anxiety; 3) school facilities/equipment; and 5) curriculum used. The study found the primary difficulties are vocabulary deficits and unmotivated students, as teachers reported. Additionally, factors like motivation, anxiety, teaching strategies, facilities, and curriculum impact these difficulties.

To address these issues, teachers try building vocabulary and promoting engagement through enjoyable activities. While teachers implement solutions, there are limitations. The small sample size means findings may not be generalizable. Further research with more diverse participants is recommended to build on these initial results about difficulties in teaching speaking. Suggestions include expanding investigations into related areas, such as sources of teachers' difficulties teaching

speaking. Overall, this research provides initial insights into speaking teaching difficulties and teachers' efforts to solve them, but more work is needed.

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