

## Voices Unheard: Teachers' Perspectives on Students' Speaking Challenges in the Classroom

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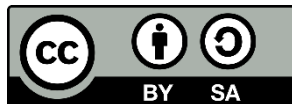
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### Abstract

*This qualitative study examines the challenges that students at a private Islamic junior high school in Palembang encounter when learning to speak, with an emphasis on the viewpoints of the teachers. Data collection involved structured interviews and classroom observations to gather insights into students' challenges. Participants included teachers and students selected through purposeful sampling. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, revealing themes such as students' fear of making mistakes, difficulty in language comprehension, and the use of native language in learning. The importance of fostering a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking linguistic risks and expressing themselves freely is emphasized in the conclusion. Strategies such as providing targeted instruction in phonetics and vocabulary, and balancing the use of the native language to support English language acquisition, are essential. This research contributes to understanding the complexities of language learning and provides insights for educators to enhance students' speaking skills effectively.*

**Keywords: EFL; Speaking' Challenges; Teachers' Perspective**

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## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the four most challenging skills to master. Internal and external factors were identified by Harmer (2015), as obstacles to teaching English as a second language to students. Internal barriers to effective communication include native language, age, innate, phonetic, skills, language identity, ego, and self-motivation. In the meantime, institutional factors from the outside of a country determine whether English is spoken as a second language or as a foreign language some researchers claim that communicating is a difficult skill, especially for EFL students. According to Hosni (2014), EFL students endeavoring to improve their speaking ability without linguistic knowledge will face many obstacles. So EFL students

should not only learn enough vocabulary and grammar, but also pay attention to how smoothly and correctly they speak and try to communicate in a meaningful way (Hinkel, 2006). In addition to learning or mastering vocabulary and knowledge structure, students who are learning to speak must also learn, comprehend, and master fluency in speaking and accuracy of speaking so that ongoing communication flows effortlessly and smoothly.

It is difficult for an EFL teacher to convey a point to students who do not speak English as their first language. First language in the EFL classroom helped to foster a good learning environment. It indicates that students' views regarding the usage of L1 in the EFL classroom were good, as seen by their willingness such as in receiving instructions, understanding difficult topics, learning new vocabularies, and socializing in the classroom (Suantara, 2023). Speaking English at school is a challenge for the students. According to Zhang (2009), speaking is still the hardest skill for most English language learners to acquire, and they are still unable to communicate verbally in English. A study by Heriansyah (2012) mentioned that in addition to other issues such a deficiency in vocabulary and bad pronunciation, students' challenges speaking English are primarily related to their lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes or inaccuracies.

There are several challenges that students encounter when learning English speaking, which makes it extremely tough for them to communicate. Ur (1996) states that when encouraging students to speak in class, teachers may encounter a few speaking issues. These include inhibition, being silent, inconsistent or limited engagement, and using one's mother tongue. In addition, the researchers conducted preliminary study by interviewing two English teachers. Based on the interviews, several problems were faced by the students in speaking activities. Namely, students had problems speaking because of challenges understanding grammar and pronunciation. In addition, students need more self-confidences, and students speaking scores are low. These problems are just a few problems in teaching and learning activities. Internet connection, students' lack of understanding, students' less motivation, lack of students' and teacher's communication, insufficient time allocation, students' reluctant speaking English, teachers' lack of understanding in using online media, students' laziness and the lack of variety in teacher's method are challenges that teacher's face in teaching speaking (Anugrah, 2022).

Several previous studies showed the same variables. The first related research was accomplished by Salihun (2019), showed that issues that students face when speaking English include inhibition (feeling bashful, fearful of making mistakes, lacking confidence), nothing to say (not knowing the word's meaning, lacking vocabulary), low or uneven participation (pronouncing the word incorrectly, not enjoying studying English), and mother tongue use (speaking is easier, preferring using mother tongue, unable speaking English). These issues are particularly significant when it comes to students and are caused by two factors: personality and cognitive style. Second, Laksmi et al., (2021) revealed that students had a number of issues when speaking, including a deficiency in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and feelings of nervousness and shyness. Several of them admitted that they felt uneasy, lacked vocabulary, and had to practice speaking English.

Speaking is verbal communication between two parties in order to convey information. This is the key to everyday communication between individuals in order to exchange

information. According to [Thornbury \(2006\)](#), Speaking is a social relationship that requires social inter personal skills and has the capacity to transform social identity. In this instance, speaking instruction discloses social elements through attitudes, evaluations, and opinions that may conflict with the class' formal attitude. Similarly, conversing is a means of interpersonal communication. People can communicate with one another using verbal discourse ([Fulcher, 2014](#)). Additionally, the ability to speak fluently with another person will make it simpler for others to comprehend and communicate accurately. In brief, speaking is verbal communication between two parties in order to convey information. This is the key to everyday communication between individuals in order to exchange information. Speaking is language skill or form of communication in which a person expresses ideas or information verbally to others.

Students believe that learning to speak is more difficult than learning to understand spoken language. This basically means that when learning to talk, students practice speaking in authentic situations in addition to listening to speakers. Getting pupils to talk in class is done for three basic reasons. The first is that speaking exercises give students the chance to rehearse in a safe environment and practice speaking in public. Second, speaking exercises that encourage students to use as much or as little of the language they are familiar with give teachers and students feedback ([Harmer, 2015](#)). Speaking proficiency guarantees that language learners can engage in active communication in the target language. Therefore, a person's oral proficiency in a target language is largely influenced by how effectively they acquire speaking abilities. Speaking in front of larger groups is something that students typically fear, therefore learning how to do it is not an easy process. This is particularly true in cultures where it is common for individuals to make fun of the flaws in other people. While some students manage to get past this obstacle, more experienced learners appear to struggle with adapting their speech to fit various contexts. As a result, language instructors ought to encourage cultural learning in addition to speaking instruction. They are also unable to converse well due to a lack of vocabulary. These are the most common issues that most language learners encounter and which require prompt resolution.

The challenge that students have when learning English is known as "English speaking problems." According to [Ur \(1996\)](#), there are four problems in teaching speaking activities that students face in the process of learning to speak, such as inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue. Along with the description, preliminary study and previous related studies, researchers formulated a problem of the study: What were teachers' perspectives on student's problems in speaking activities at one of Private Islamic schools in Palembang?

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

A qualitative approach was used in this study. In this research, the researchers used qualitative data to find out the teacher's problems in teaching speaking by using interviews. This study was included in the case study as a design.

### **Participants**

Participants in this research were teachers and students. The two English teachers were interviewed by the researchers, while those for observation was class VIII students. The criteria

in selecting the participants were based on the preliminary study researchers conducted to the English teachers who faced challenges in teaching speaking. So, the researchers used two English teachers and students of one of Private Islamic Junior High School in Palembang as research participants.

### **Data collection**

Researchers used observation and interviews to obtain data for the study. Observations and interviews were carried out to collect information related to the speaking learning problems faced by students. In the observation, the researchers examined one class. The interview applied in this research was a structured interview prepared by the researchers with several questions based on some aspect from [Ur \(1996\)](#) such as; inhibition, nothing to say, low or even participant and mother-tongue. Then, the researchers asked the teacher to obtain information. Also, students were interviewed to gather supporting data about the problems students face when speaking English. The researchers documented data in the form of interview transcripts about the problems students face in speaking.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze the teacher problems in teaching speaking English to student, the researcher used thematic analysis. As it offers fundamental abilities for carrying out several other types of qualitative research, thematic analysis is a technique for finding, evaluating, arranging, characterizing, and reporting themes with a data set ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). Moreover, the researcher conducted an analysis of the data regarding Students Problems in learning Speaking based on the procedures outlined by [Creswell \(2014\)](#). Initial data collection was consisted of interviews (transcriptions or typed notes). The researcher then inserted the data into computer folders after receiving the transcription. The researcher then began coding the data as associated with the research questions for this study. The researchers sent a personal communication as the concluding summary of this study. The final step in establishing this study is by conducting a methodological triangulation. It is used to check credibility of the data by using different techniques such as observation and interview.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Findings**

From the results of observation and interview data have been analyzed, the researchers found several problems faced by students in learning speaking according to the teachers' perspectives. In the table below, the researchers divided the data results into a number of themes and codes based on the findings of this investigation. Following an analysis of the interviews, themes and codes were identified.

**Table 1. Themes and Codes**

Themes	Codes
Students fear of making mistakes	a. The students feared of being laughed at by peers. b. The students feared of making grammar pronunciation, and vocabulary mistake c. The students felt embarrassed of afraid while speaking. d. The students felt embarrassed or afraid while speaking.

Difficulty in Language comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The students had difficulty in understanding pronunciation.</li> <li>b. The students had limited vocabulary.</li> <li>c. The students faced difficulty understanding the English language.</li> </ul>
Use of native language in learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The students struggled with Incorporating their native language With English</li> <li>b. The students encountered challenges in using their native language.</li> </ul>

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### Students' Fear of Making Mistakes

The classroom observations revealed a prevalent fear among students of being ridiculed by their peers during speaking activities. They seemed fearful of being judged by peers. This fear was further emphasized during interviews with teacher, Mr L noted,

*" they feel uncomfortable with their friends, their afraid of make fun that's why they feel worry to say something.".* (L, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).

These insights underscore the impact of social dynamics on students' willingness to participate in speaking tasks and high light the importance of creating a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment. By addressing this fear and promoting a culture of respect and acceptance, educators can help students overcome their reluctance to engage in speaking activities and foster a more inclusive learning environment.

The fear of making grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary mistakes emerged as a significant concern among students, as observed during classroom activities. They seemed fearful of making mistakes and confirmed through interviews with teacher, Ms. T mentioned,

*" they are afraid of making mistakes so they can't and they don't dare to say something while speaking and they are worry about making mistakes, especially in pronunciations and grammar and the meaning of vocabulary ".* (L, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).

These observations aligned with research indicating that students may feel self-conscious about their language proficiency and fear being judged based on their grammatical accuracy, pronunciation and vocabulary. Therefore, addressing this fear by providing a supportive learning environment where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for growth can help alleviate students' anxiety and encourage greater participation in speaking tasks.

Observations during classroom activities revealed that students often exhibited heightened anxiety and unease regarding academic assessment, particularly during speaking evaluations. Many students appeared preoccupied with concerns about their performance being evaluated and graded, which see med to inhibit their willingness to take risks and participate actively in speaking tasks. interviews with teacher Mr. L supported this observation, with the teacher acknowledging the impact of assessment-related anxiety on students' speaking confidence. Ms. T shared insights from his interview, stating,

*"They are worries to have poor grades and the anxiety level is very high".* (T, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).

To address these concerns, educators must create assessment practices that prioritize growth and learning rather than solely focusing on grades. Providing constructive feedback that emphasizes progress and improvement can help alleviate students' anxiety about evaluation. Additionally, offering opportunities for low-stakes assessments, such as peer evaluations or self-assessments, can empower students to take ownership of their learning and reduce the fear associated with formal assessments.

### **Difficulty in Language Comprehension**

Difficulty understanding pronunciation can significantly impede language learning progress for students. Observations in the classroom indicate that students often struggle to grasp the nuances of pronunciation, leading to frustration and disengagement. Many students faced challenges in fluently articulating themselves in English, often pausing mid-sentence or struggling with pronunciation and grammar. This observation is supported by interviews with teachers, where Miss T noted,

*"when I become a teacher at school, yes, I feel that it is difficult for me to understand what my students are saying. Because our first language is mother language, so they don't make an English as their daily speaking, we can say that they don't mention the gist of the topic." (T, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).*

Similarly, Teacher L emphasized,

*"yeah, they're feeling hesitant when they want to speak because they don't understand well about the pronunciation and meaning of the words they want to say or something like that. So we need to practice useful certain expression." (L, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).*

These sentiments highlight the critical need for targeted instruction and practice in phonetics and pronunciation. Integrating activities that focus on sound discrimination, stress patterns, and intonation can help students develop a more accurate ear for English pronunciation. Additionally, providing ample opportunities for listening practice with varied accents and speech rates can enhance students' comprehension skills over time. By addressing these pronunciation challenges head-on, educators can support students in overcoming this obstacle and progressing towards greater fluency and communication competence in English.

Limited vocabulary poses a significant challenge for language learners hindering their ability to express themselves effectively and comprehend complex texts. Classroom observations have revealed that students often struggle to express their intended English words clearly before speaking, resulting in hesitancy and pauses during conversations. Teacher interviews corroborate these findings, with Teacher T remarking,

*"Ok I think my students are, worried or difficult to explain something in the class because they don't know about the vocabulary, their vocabularies are decreased. So their vocabularies are in a small context, so they could not express their vocabularies in the class" and also "My students know which English words they want to say when they speak. But I think, just like I said before because they lack of vocabulary, so they just talk a little bit." (T, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).*

Similarly, Teacher L noted,

*"sometimes there are some words in certain expressions which they don't know their meanings."* (L, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).

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To address this issue, educators can implement various strategies to expand students' vocabulary. These may include vocabulary-building exercises, such as word banks context-based learning, and vocabulary games. Furthermore, encouraging extensive reading and providing exposure to authentic language use can help students encounter new words in context and reinforce their understanding. By systematically addressing vocabulary limitations, educators can empower students to become more proficient communicators and enhance their overall language skills.

### **Use of Native Language in Learning**

Incorporating the native language with English in language learning settings is a multifaceted endeavor, as supported by both observational data and teacher interviews. While integrating the native language can serve as a bridge to facilitate comprehension and clarify complex linguistic concepts, it also poses challenges such as the risk of linguistic dependency and hindering students' English language acquisition. Observations reveal that some students relied on their mother tongue as a fallback option, especially when encountering challenges in expressing themselves in English. However, interviews with teachers highlight concerns about the potential pitfalls of excessive reliance on the native language, including the inhibition of English language fluency and the reinforcement of students' dependence on their mother tongue. Teacher T emphasized the delicate balance required in incorporating the native language, stating,

*"Yes, of course, because we always get carried away with our mother tongue or Palembang language, it makes difficult for me as a teacher, because when we want to explain, sometimes we get carried away with Palembang language, so it's a bit annoying when we want to speak but our mother tongue or our first language comes out, so it's hard to speak combined with our mother tongue".* (T, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).

Similarly, Teacher L echoed these sentiments, stating,

*"Actually it is disturbing but it is ok to as long as the conversation still run, they can combine with their mother tongue but I try to become role model for them to use English in speaking class".* (L, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).

Balancing the use of the native language as a supportive tool with the promotion of immersive English learning experiences emerges as a key consideration for educators, emphasizing the importance of strategic language integration in optimizing language learning outcomes.

Challenges in using the native language within the English learning environment present complexities for educators, as indicated by both observational findings and teacher insights. Observations suggested that there was a noticeable tendency among students to rely on their native language as a backup when acquiring English skills, particularly during speaking activities and certain student sex pressed a preference for using their mother tongue due to a fear of speaking English, especially in front of their peers. This challenge is compounded by



concerns about inadvertently reinforcing students' reliance on their mother tongue and impeding their English language acquisition. Teacher interviews shed light on the intricacies involved in navigating this issue, with educators expressing reservations about the potential drawbacks of incorporating the native language too extensively. Teacher T expressed concerns, stating,

*"I think so, because when we interact with our students using English, some of our students have prior knowledge, and the rest may have lack knowledge. That's why, some for students who are not good in English, we have to make a condition or be able to create many methods so the students who were poor English, we motivate them to use English vocabulary and memorize it as well". (T, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).*

Similarly, Teacher L highlighted the dilemma, saying,

*"Yes, this is a problem as well as a challenge, I hope they will speak up and communicate verbally in English without fear of being wrong because I will continue to guide and encourage them ". (L, Personal Communication, July 19th, 2023).*

Navigating the challenges of incorporating the native language while promoting English language proficiency underscores the need for educators to adopt nuanced strategies that foster linguistic diversity while ensuring students' active engagement in English language learning. Balancing the use of the native language as a supportive tool with the promotion of immersive English language environments emerges as a critical consideration for educators striving to optimize language learning outcomes.

## **Discussion**

After analyzing the data using thematic analysis, the researchers found that there were students' problems in learning speaking one of Private Islamic Junior High School in Palembang according to the teachers' perspective as follows: (1) Students' fear of making mistakes, (2) Difficulty in language comprehension, (3) Use of native language in learning. Therefore, the discussion of those points will be explained below to see more information about them. The first was in the context of English language learning, students' fear of making grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary mistakes, According to [Liu et al. \(2019\)](#), the quality of adolescents relationships with peers can influence internalizing challenges. Peer support may reduce peer challenges, which can impact the level of internalizing problems among adolescents. Similarly, language-related anxiety, including grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary errors, poses a significant barrier for language learners, affecting communication and language acquisition ([MacIntyre et al., 2020](#)). Additionally, academic assessment anxiety is a common concern among students, influencing learning outcomes positively or negatively depending on coping strategies ([Birenbaum, 2014](#)). Glossophobia, or the fear of public speaking, also presents a major challenge for effective communication, with implications for social interaction and daily functioning ([Antony & Swinson, 2017](#)).

The second, communicating in English can pose several challenges for language learners. Firstly, individuals may encounter difficulty in understanding the pronunciation of English words, which may differ from their native language. [Rack et al., \(1994\)](#) highlights the importance of phonetic recognition in improving the understanding of word pronunciation in a second language. Secondly, limited vocabulary can also be a hurdle. According to a study by



Nation (2006), expanding vocabulary through meaningful contexts is key to enhancing language proficiency. Lastly, some individuals may struggle with comprehending 31 English language overall Cummins (1984) underscores the significance of contextual factors in facilitating the understanding of a second language. Addressing these challenges, a holistic and structured approach to language learning can be an effective solution.

The third was in navigating the complexities of language acquisition and communication, learners often grapple with the integration of their native language with English. García (2009) emphasizes the value of incorporating a learner's native language as a scaffold for acquiring English proficiency, highlighting the importance of leveraging linguistic resources available to learners. However, this process is not without its challenges, as learners may encounter challenges in reconciling the differences between their native language and English. Studies such as those by Kramsch (1993) shed light on the challenges learners face in negotiating the boundaries between their native language and the target language, underscoring the need for strategies that address these linguistic tensions. Ultimately, while incorporating the native language can be beneficial, learners must navigate the complexities and challenges inherent in this process to effectively acquire proficiency in both languages.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it is evident that students one of Private Islamic Junior High School in Palembang faced several challenges in learning speaking according to teachers' perspectives. These challenges can be categorized into three main themes: (1) Students' fear of making mistakes, (2) Difficulty in language comprehension, and (3) Use of native language in learning. Firstly, students' fear of making mistakes encompasses various concerns such as being ridiculed by peers, anxiety about grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary errors, as well as apprehension regarding academic assessment. These fears inhibit students' willingness to engage in speaking activities and hinder their language learning progress. Secondly, difficulty in language comprehension manifests in struggles with pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and overall comprehension of the English language. These challenges impede students' ability to articulate themselves fluently and understand spoken and written English effectively. Lastly, the use of the native language in learning presents a complex dilemma. While incorporating the native language can provide support for students, it also risks hindering their English language acquisition and fluency. Finding the right balance between leveraging students' linguistic backgrounds and promoting English language proficiency is crucial for effective language learning. In addressing these challenges, it is essential for educators to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel safe to take linguistic risks and express themselves freely. Strategies such as providing targeted instruction in pronunciation, vocabulary- building exercises, and integrating diverse instructional methods tailored to students' proficiency levels can help mitigate these challenges.

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