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Research Article

Classroom Praxis of Applied Oral Communication Strategies in Enhancing English Speaking Skills in Indonesian Secondary School

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ABSTRACT

Speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners due to the need for real-time language processing, self-confidence, and adequate linguistic knowledge. This mixed-method study explores students' perceived difficulties in speaking English, using both quantitative data from questionnaires completed by 91 students and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with teachers. The quantitative results highlight affective barriers such as low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety when speaking in front of others. Linguistic challenges, including limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties, were also found to hinder fluency and cause reliance on first-language translation. Additionally, limited opportunities to practice speaking both inside and outside the classroom further restricted students' progress. Qualitative findings echoed these challenges and revealed deeper motivational and institutional constraints. Drawing on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety theory and sociocultural learning perspectives, the study emphasizes the importance of learner-centered approaches that create emotionally supportive environments and promote meaningful interaction. Suggested pedagogical strategies include using digital tools to ease anxiety, peer-based speaking activities, pronunciation-focused tasks, increased speaking time in class, and consistent, structured teacher feedback. Finally, the study recommends longitudinal research to observe changes in speaking proficiency over time and assess interventions' effectiveness.

Keywords: *Classroom interaction, EFL learners, Language learning, Linguistic challenges, Speaking anxiety*

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INTRODUCTION

The capacity to speak effectively in English constitutes a fundamental element of communicative competence. It is increasingly prioritized in language education policy across various EFL contexts. At the secondary school level, the ability to express ideas orally in English is essential for academic achievement and crucial for future academic and professional engagement (Ayala et al., 2024; Le & Shuo, 2023). Nevertheless, developing English speaking skills among secondary students remains a persistent challenge. Despite curricular reforms promoting communicative language teaching (CLT), empirical evidence suggests that students often struggle with oral production due to linguistic limitations, psychological barriers, and socio-cultural factors (Hajiyeva, 2024; Malik et al., 2021).

Several studies have consistently reported that secondary school learners encounter a range of difficulties in speaking English, including anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, lack of vocabulary, and limited opportunities for authentic interaction (Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022; Tawir & Bin Baharum, 2024). These challenges are often exacerbated in EFL settings such as Indonesia, where English is not used in daily communication and where large class sizes and exam-driven instruction restrict the implementation of interactive speaking activities (Marlia et al., 2023; Mukminin et al., 2015). While the literature provides ample insight into learner-related obstacles, a significant gap exists in understanding how English teachers respond to these difficulties through their classroom practices. The teacher's role is not merely a facilitator but also a designer of learning conditions that can constrain or enable students' oral language development (Asefa & Enashe, 2024).

"The development of English speaking skills among secondary students remains a persistent challenge"

This study is therefore situated at the intersection of learner experience and teacher praxis. It seeks to explore the principal challenges faced by secondary school students in English-speaking classrooms and the strategies and practices employed by English teachers to address those challenges. Such an inquiry is timely and significant, particularly in applied linguistics and vocational English education, where emphasis is placed on language acquisition and practical use of language in real-world settings (Chen & Hwang, 2022). Given the rising demands for oral English proficiency in globalized educational and workplace environments, the pedagogical implications of how speaking skills are taught at the secondary level warrant closer scrutiny.

Although many studies have investigated the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in acquiring speaking skills (Holandyah et al., 2022; Pratolo et al., 2019; Wulandari et al., 2021), there is a paucity of research on the deliberate and systematic implementation of specific oral communication strategies in classroom practice to improve speaking proficiency, especially within the context of Indonesian secondary schools. This study provides a unique contribution by integrating theory and practice through a comprehensive analysis of instructors' implementation of oral communication strategies in actual classroom environments and the impact of these methods on students' speaking growth. Much of this

research has been largely concerned with detecting student issues and perspectives rather than investigating systematic educational interventions. Existing study tends to emphasize learners' affective and cognitive constraints (e.g., nervousness, lack of confidence, limited exposure) or isolated method use, without exploring how oral communication techniques are explicitly and systematically embedded inside actual classroom instruction.

This study fills in a very important gap by looking into how teachers use certain oral communication techniques in real classrooms, like paraphrasing, circumlocution, and changing the way students talk to each other. This study is different from others because it looks at strategy use in the classroom and is based on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Walqui, 2006) and communicative competence (Cheung, 2014; Oliver et al., 2005). It does this by looking at how teaching strategies can help students improve their speaking skills. This study makes a useful and useful-to-teachers addition to the field of EFL speaking instruction in Indonesia by looking at how teacher-mediated strategy instruction affects students' spoken performance.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it adds to the limited body of classroom-based research at the secondary level in EFL contexts, a tier often underrepresented in empirical studies that focus on tertiary education. Second, by adopting a dual-perspective approach, this research highlights the dynamic interplay between learners' speaking challenges and teachers' adaptive strategies. Third, it offers practical implications for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers in designing more responsive and context-sensitive approaches to speaking instruction. This aligns with the call for a more nuanced understanding of how language pedagogy can be localized to address specific sociolinguistic realities.

In the broader discourse of applied linguistics, this paper contributes to reimagining the speaking classroom not merely as a space for linguistic output but as a pedagogical site shaped by interactional, affective, and institutional forces. Addressing speaking-related challenges early is vital for vocational English education, where communicative competence is a gateway to employability and social mobility. Hence, this research provides empirical data and pedagogical insight that may inform more equitable and effective teaching practices in the secondary school EFL classroom. This study has two research questions:
(1) What are the challenges faced by secondary students in English-speaking classrooms?
(2) How do English teachers address these challenges through their classroom practices?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Complexity of Teaching Speaking in EFL Contexts

Teaching speaking in EFL is widely recognized as a complex task due to the real-time nature of oral communication. Learners are required to activate multiple linguistic subsystems including vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation while also attending to interactional norms and social context. Unlike writing, speaking provides no time for planning or revision, which increases the demand for fluency and accuracy. Sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and mediated activities (Vygotsky, 1978). This means that speaking development in EFL classrooms must be supported by opportunities

for authentic interaction and scaffolded dialogue. Adolescent learners face additional difficulties due to their developmental stage, which influences cognitive processing and emotional regulation (Ahmed et al., 2015).

Despite curricular intentions to promote communicative competence, speaking is often overlooked in favor of reading and writing, particularly in systems dominated by high-stakes testing. When oral skills are excluded from formal assessments, they tend to be marginalized in daily instruction (Cheung, 2014; Oliver et al., 2005). Productive skills such as speaking require consistent exposure to comprehensible input and regular practice with meaningful output and feedback, but such conditions are rarely met in rigid, exam-driven systems (Burns, 1998).

Pedagogical Approaches and Task Design

Many EFL classrooms continue to rely on traditional methodologies such as substitution drills and scripted dialogues. These approaches tend to focus on linguistic accuracy at the expense of communicative competence. Such methods limit learners' ability to develop interactional skills (Străchinaru, 2025). In contrast, communicative methodologies such as task-based language teaching (TBLT) have been shown to promote real-life language use and learner engagement (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). These approaches align with sociocultural theory by embedding learning in meaningful social contexts.

Communicative tasks such as storytelling, simulations, and problem-solving help build learners' fluency and confidence by allowing them to use the language in context. These tasks lower learners' anxiety and promote greater willingness to communicate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Strong, 2013). When supported with scaffolding, such as modeling and structured guidance, these activities become effective platforms for oral language development.

Student-Related Challenges in the Speaking Classroom

Affective variables play a crucial role in shaping learners' oral participation. Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) explains how fear of negative evaluation can inhibit learners' willingness to speak (Horwitz et al., 1986). This is particularly common among adolescent learners who are highly sensitive to peer perception. Emotional variables such as enjoyment, self-confidence, and perceived competence directly influence learners' willingness to communicate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Without a positive emotional climate, even capable students may remain silent during speaking tasks.

To reduce anxiety and foster engagement, low-anxiety classrooms are essential (Young, 1991). Scaffolding techniques such as visual aids, modeling, and structured collaboration can help learners manage complex speaking tasks (Walqui, 2006), combined with a flipped learning instructional strategy (Herda et al., 2025; Santhanasamy & Yunus, 2022). These strategies are consistent with sociocultural theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process. Learners also face difficulties in vocabulary retrieval, pronunciation, and syntactic formation, which disrupt fluency. This is often referred to as receptive–productive imbalance, where students understand input but struggle to produce language spontaneously (Gass & Mackey, 2006). Fluency can only develop through frequent,

supported output and meaningful communicative interaction (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 1988).

Sociocultural and Institutional Constraints

The classroom environment and broader institutional structures also shape how speaking is approached. In many contexts, teacher-centered instruction dominates classroom discourse, limiting student agency and reducing speaking opportunities. Traditional classroom norms often prioritize correctness over communication, which discourages students from experimenting with language (Taylor, 1983). Students in such classrooms may fear embarrassment or punishment if they make errors while speaking.

Sociocultural theory highlights the importance of interaction and mediation in language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Classrooms that minimize student talk deprive learners of the experiences necessary for language growth. Furthermore, when speaking is excluded from formal assessment, both teachers and students may view it as non-essential. This phenomenon is known as the washback effect, where assessment shapes instructional priorities (Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010). Dialogic teaching, which emphasizes extended student talk and shared meaning-making, is essential for integrating speaking into daily instruction (Lyle, 2008).

Teacher Strategies and the Role of Agency

Teachers play a key role in enabling or constraining the development of speaking skills. When teachers adopt communicative methodologies such as TBLT, they provide students with structured opportunities to use language in authentic and purposeful ways (Ellis, 2003). These tasks promote negotiation of meaning and collaborative engagement, which build fluency and confidence. Creating a psychologically safe classroom is equally important. Supportive feedback and gradual release of responsibility encourage students to take risks and participate actively (Walqui, 2006; Young, 1991).

Teachers' beliefs and experiences, also known as teacher cognition, significantly influence their pedagogical decisions. Teacher cognition is the interaction of knowledge, beliefs, and experience that shapes classroom practice (Borg, 2003). Reflective teaching helps educators align their practices with research-based principles and adapt to learner needs (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Supporting teacher agency through professional development and collaboration is essential for fostering adaptive and inclusive speaking instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore the challenges faced by secondary school students in English-speaking classrooms and the strategies employed by their teachers to address these challenges. A mixed-method design is advantageous, as it allows for data triangulation, offering a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative component involves a survey administered to secondary school students, while the qualitative component includes an interview with the teacher. This design allows for collecting both statistical data on student experiences and in-depth insights

into the teacher's pedagogical practices, providing a holistic view of the teaching and learning process (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Participants

The participants in this study include 91 secondary school students and one English teacher from a secondary school in Gresik, East Java, Indonesia. The students were randomly selected from grades 10 to 12, aged between 15 and 17. The selection aimed to represent a broad spectrum of academic backgrounds and English proficiency levels. According to (Mackey & Gass, 2022), selecting a diverse sample of participants ensures that the study can capture a variety of perspectives, which is crucial for understanding the complexity of language learning challenges. The teacher, who has over five years of teaching experience, was chosen for their extensive involvement in teaching English speaking skills at the secondary level. Their first-hand knowledge of classroom practices makes them an ideal participant to offer insights into addressing challenges in teaching English speaking skills (Borg, 2015).

Table 1
Gender and Age of Students

Gender		Age (Years Old)	
Male	39 Students	< 15	2 Students
		15 - 16	26 Students
Female	52 Students	17 - 18	60 Students
		> 18	3 Students
Total: 91 Students			

Data Collection Methods

Student Questionnaire

The researchers developed the student questionnaire used in this study and validated it with experts to ensure its accuracy and relevance. It consisted of 23 closed-ended items on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree,” to identify the challenges students experience in English-speaking classes. Based on current theories and research in second language learning, the items were created to capture important factors affecting speaking ability, such as anxiety, vocabulary, and practice opportunities. Expert judgment was employed to assess the content validity of the questionnaire. It was administered electronically via Google Forms and completed anonymously to encourage honest responses. The questionnaire was an essential part of the research procedure since it was the primary quantitative tool for gathering data on students' assessments of their speaking difficulties and the frequency with which they used various oral communication tactics. It comprehensively understood common patterns, affective factors, and linguistic problems among 91 secondary school students. To ensure clarity and validity, the questionnaire was carefully modified from Alrasheedi’s (2020). and revised in response to expert feedback from EFL educators and academics to fit with the context of the study. A

pilot test was conducted with a small group of students who shared comparable characteristics to the target responders. This helped to identify any ambiguous language or potentially misleading elements. Minor changes were made to aid comprehension, such as using basic, age-appropriate language and offering brief explanations or examples as needed. The questionnaire was also conducted in a guided session, which allowed the researcher or teacher to clarify any doubts in real time, ensuring that all respondents understood the items before responding. This technique improved both the dependability of the obtained data and the legitimacy of the students' responses. In this way, the questionnaire can be accessed through this link https://forms.gle/wXGooXEkEiwcGdBP6

Teacher Interview

In addition to the student questionnaire, qualitative data were obtained through an in-depth, face-to-face interview with the English teacher. The interview employed a semi-structured format, enabling the researcher to explore the teacher's pedagogical experiences and strategies for addressing challenges in speaking instruction (Syam et al., 2023). The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, the teacher's native language, to facilitate ease of expression and reduce the potential for miscommunication. Employing the participant's first language in qualitative interviews is a widely accepted practice, particularly in educational research, as it allows for greater depth, authenticity, and nuance in participant responses (Ruslin et al., 2022). The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's informed consent. Guiding topics included common obstacles encountered in the speaking classroom, techniques for reducing learner anxiety and promoting participation, the role of corrective feedback in developing speaking proficiency, and strategies for engaging students across varying levels of oral competence. The transcribed data provided rich, contextualized insights that complemented and extended the findings derived from the quantitative questionnaire responses.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The data obtained from the student questionnaire, which employed a five-point Likert scale, were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically mean and standard deviation, to identify the central tendencies and variations in students' responses. The analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 25. This approach enabled the researcher to capture patterns in learners' perceptions regarding their challenges in English-speaking classrooms. The use of mean and standard deviation in Likert-scale analysis is widely recognized in educational research as a valid method for interpreting response trends (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Qualitative Analysis

For the qualitative data from the teacher interview, thematic analysis was employed. This approach involves reviewing the interview transcript, coding relevant excerpts, and identifying recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Khokhar et al., 2020), related to the teacher's strategies for addressing challenges in speaking classrooms. Thematic analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the teacher's practical steps to improve students' speaking skills (Dawadi, 2020). In conducting thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke, (2006) highlighted that the process of coding involved some stages: 1) Familiarization with the Data, 2) Generating Initial Codes, 3) Searching for Themes, 4) Reviewing Themes, 5) Defining and Naming Themes, 6) Writing the Report. The researchers carried out this analysis independently to ensure reliability and validity, with discrepancies discussed and resolved to reach a consensus. Using multiple researchers in the coding process enhances the trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the study. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. The students were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The teacher was also informed that participation would not affect their professional standing. These ethical safeguards ensured that the study adhered to established research standards.

FINDINGS

Affective Barriers and Learner Confidence

The survey data revealed significant affective barriers that students encounter while speaking English. Specifically, item A1 yielded a mean score of 2.91 (SD = 0.91), which indicates that students generally lack self-confidence when using English. This finding suggests that many students struggle with their belief in their ability to speak the language, impacting their overall engagement in speaking activities.

Table 2
Affective Barrier & Learner's Confidence

Code	Items	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)
A1	I feel confident when speaking English	2.91	0.91
A2	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English	3.68	1.03
A3	I feel nervous speaking English in front of a group	3.54	1.19
A4	I feel embarrassed when speaking English in front of my classmates	3.08	1.07

Further analysis of the survey data highlighted the students' fear of making mistakes. Item A2 received a higher mean score of 3.68 (SD = 1.03), pointing to a widespread apprehension

about error in communication. This fear often hinders students from taking risks or attempting to speak, which is essential for language learning.

Anxiety surrounding public speaking was also a significant concern. The item A3 had a mean score of 3.54 (SD = 1.19), while A4 received a mean score of 3.08 (SD = 1.07). These findings further illustrate that speaking in front of peers, especially in a classroom environment, generates significant discomfort, which is often related to concerns over judgment and self-perception.

The teacher's perspective confirmed these findings, stating, *"Students who struggle are often the ones who have already underestimated themselves. Even when they are encouraged in class, they still believe that English is too difficult and that they will never be able to master it."* This reinforces the idea that students' lack of self-efficacy and deeply ingrained fear of failure contribute substantially to their reluctance to engage in English speaking activities.

Linguistic Limitations and Classroom Practices

Linguistic limitations were a significant barrier to students' speaking fluency. The survey data indicated that L1 had the highest mean score (Mean = 4.09; SD = 1.01), highlighting students' common struggle due to inadequate vocabulary. A limited lexicon makes it difficult for students to express themselves freely, which in turn affects their ability to engage in meaningful conversations in English.

Table 3
Linguistic Limitations

Code	Items	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)
L1	My limited vocabulary affects my ability to speak English	4.09	1.01
L2	I often struggle to find the right word when speaking English	3.63	0.98
L3	I struggle to pronounce English words correctly	3.49	1.00
L4	I translate from my first language when speaking English	2.92	1.09
L5	I need more opportunities to practice speaking in class	4.20	0.95

In addition to vocabulary limitations, students also reported word choice and pronunciation challenges. The L2 scored a mean of 3.63 (SD = 0.98), and the item L3 had a mean of 3.49 (SD = 1.00). These linguistic challenges further compound students' difficulties with speaking, leading to pauses or reliance on their first language for translation, which interferes with their fluency.

Moreover, many students admitted to translating from their first language when speaking English, as evidenced by the item L4 (Mean = 2.92; SD = 1.09). This behavior indicates limited automaticity in language use, as students are still dependent on their native language structures and vocabulary, slowing down their English communication.

The teacher explained their approach to addressing these issues, saying, *"In the first stage, we focus on building vocabulary… Then, they practice pre-prepared dialogues… Once students master these, they create their own conversations."* Although this method appears effective in scaffolding students' learning, the data revealed that students still desire more opportunities

to practice speaking. The item L5 scored a high mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.95), signaling that students need more speaking practice within the classroom context.

Environmental and Socio-Cultural Influences

Environmental and socio-cultural factors also played a significant role in shaping students' speaking difficulties. The teacher observed that students' motivation to speak English remains moderate to low, stating, *"The desire to speak English still needs to be continuously encouraged."* This suggests that students' interest in speaking English is not always intrinsic but may be influenced by external factors such as peer influence, teacher encouragement, and the socio-cultural context in which they live.

The teacher further noted the impact of rural living on students' exposure to English, saying, *"We are in a rural area where the culture greatly influences their interests… the podcasts they listen to, the* YouTube *videos they watch… these impact their English proficiency."* This indicates that the limited access to authentic English content outside of the classroom inhibits students' ability to immerse themselves in the language and practice outside school hours, which is essential for language acquisition.

Additionally, the teacher highlighted the lack of parental support for English learning, which they viewed as a significant challenge: *"Very few parents support their children's English proficiency… this becomes a significant challenge."* The absence of this support further compounds the challenges students face in their learning journey, as it limits their exposure to English outside the classroom and reduces their motivation to continue learning. The school environment itself also posed barriers to learning. The teacher mentioned, *"The school environment has not yet developed a culture of daily English usage… we've tried several times to establish this, but it has not yet been successful."* Despite efforts to create an English-speaking culture within the school, these attempts have yet to yield tangible results, contributing to the lack of a language-rich environment crucial for fostering speaking proficiency.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the challenges that secondary-level students face in speaking English, and the findings reveal a complex interplay of affective, linguistic, and contextual variables. Among the most salient barriers identified were affective factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. Student responses showed a widespread reluctance to speak in front of others, primarily driven by apprehension about being judged or corrected. These findings align with the conceptual framework of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), which posits that emotional barriers can significantly hinder language performance, particularly in oral communication. The results further support the view of MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), who argue that anxiety impacts not only the quantity but also the quality of speech production by interfering with working memory and attention during communicative tasks. In adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by heightened self-awareness and peer sensitivity, such barriers can be particularly acute and enduring.

The teacher's observations corroborate these findings, emphasizing that many students *"underestimate themselves"* even when provided with encouragement. This insight

resonates with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that individuals' belief in their ability to perform a task is a key determinant of actual performance. Students who perceive English as inherently difficult are less likely to take communicative risks, even in supportive classroom settings. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis similarly argues that when learners are anxious or unmotivated, their emotional state acts as a barrier that limits input processing and inhibits output. The persistence of such negative belief's points to the importance of explicitly addressing students' affective needs in the classroom, not as peripheral concerns, but as foundational to the success of any speaking-oriented instruction.

Alongside these psychological constraints, the study identified several linguistic challenges that impede students' oral proficiency. Vocabulary limitations were particularly prominent, with students reporting frequent difficulty retrieving words and expressing ideas fluently. These issues are consistent with findings by Gass and Mackey (2006), who explain that real-time language production draws heavily on automatic lexical and grammatical processing, which many learners have not yet developed. The reliance on translation from the first language further indicates limited internalization of English structures and suggests that students have not yet achieved the level of automatization necessary for fluent speech. Though often underestimated, pronunciation difficulties also emerged as a recurring concern, affecting students' confidence and willingness to participate. Szyszka (2011) emphasizes that pronunciation problems—particularly when left unaddressed—reduce intelligibility and contribute to social anxiety and perceived incompetence. When combined with emotional insecurities, these linguistic constraints form a cycle in which hesitation, silence, and avoidance become normalized behaviors in the speaking classroom.

The pedagogical approach described by the teacher—progressing from vocabulary-building to controlled dialogue and eventually to free production—reflects an attempt to scaffold student learning in a manageable way. This method is grounded in the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development concept, which holds that learners benefit from tasks beyond their current competence when provided with appropriate support (Panhwar et al., 2016). However, despite the structured instruction design, students still strongly needed more speaking opportunities. The high mean score for the item L5 indicates that the current instructional time allocated to oral practice is insufficient. Wood (2001) contends that speaking fluency does not emerge automatically from general language exposure but must be systematically cultivated through purposeful, contextualized, and frequent activities. The students expressed desire for more practice should not be seen as a simple request for more time, but as a call for greater access to meaningful communicative experiences that align with their real needs as language users.

The influence of environmental and socio-cultural factors further compounds the difficulties students face. The teacher's comment that *"the desire to speak English still needs to be encouraged"* highlights that learners' motivation is not always intrinsic but often shaped by external conditions such as peer dynamics, community values, and perceived utility of English. Darvin and Norton (2015) argue that language learning is inextricably linked to identity, and that learners' investment in the target language depends on whether they see it as relevant to their lives and future aspirations. In rural settings, where English is rarely

used outside the classroom, students may struggle to find authentic purposes for speaking and may not view it as socially or culturally meaningful. The teacher noted that the lack of exposure to English-language media further restricts learners' access to input and models of spoken discourse. These findings echo the work of Reinders and Benson (2017), who emphasize that successful language development depends not only on instruction but also on the presence of a language-rich environment that supports autonomous learning.

Parental support also emerged as a significant variable influencing learners' speaking development. The teacher noted that only a small proportion of parents actively support their children's efforts to learn English, which can undermine motivation and reinforce the idea that English is not a priority. Taylor (1983) maintains that learners' orientation toward language is heavily influenced by their immediate social context, including familial attitudes and expectations. School-based instruction can become isolated without encouragement or reinforcement at home, limiting its impact. Compounding this challenge is the institutional context: the teacher reported that the school has not yet cultivated a culture of English usage, despite repeated efforts. This suggests that individual teacher efforts, however well-intentioned, may not be sufficient without institutional alignment. Creating a sustained culture of spoken English requires a coordinated strategy that involves school leadership, curricular reform, and community outreach.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, they affirm that speaking is not merely a linguistic activity but a socially and emotionally embedded practice that must be approached holistically. Pedagogically, the study underscores the need for classrooms that are linguistically rich, emotionally safe, and contextually relevant. Teachers must be equipped to design communicative tasks that are cognitively appropriate, affectively sensitive, and socially engaging (Ellis, 2003). In particular, task-based language teaching offers a promising framework for integrating fluency development with meaningful interaction (Alasal, 2025), provided that learners are given sufficient time, feedback, and opportunities to reflect on their performance.

From a practical standpoint, school administrators and policy-makers must take steps to support teachers in creating environments that promote speaking. This includes increasing the time allocated to oral skills in the curriculum, providing professional development in communicative language teaching, and integrating speaking into assessment systems. As Kılıçkaya (2016) has argued, the marginalization of speaking in high-stakes examinations is one of the primary reasons it receives less attention in classrooms. Moreover, efforts should be made to extend English use beyond the classroom, through extracurricular programs, digital tools, and partnerships with families. In rural settings, especially, access to English-language media and opportunities for informal communication can make a crucial difference. Addressing these systemic challenges requires pedagogical innovation and institutional commitment to language development as a holistic process.

In summary, this study highlights that the ability to speak English confidently and fluently is shaped by a dynamic set of factors beyond grammar and vocabulary. Affective readiness, linguistic competence, classroom experience, and broader socio-cultural contexts influence learners' willingness and ability to speak. Addressing these challenges calls for an

integrated approach that empowers both learners and teachers to navigate the complexities of language use in meaningful, supported, and sustained ways. The development of speaking skills, particularly in EFL contexts-is not a technical problem to be solved, but a human endeavor to be understood and nurtured.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges encountered by secondary-level students in learning to speak English. The findings showed that emotional, linguistic, and contextual factors were closely connected in shaping students' speaking difficulties. Many students reported anxiety, fear of judgment, and low confidence, which discouraged them from participating in spoken activities. These emotional barriers were often linked to limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and reliance on translating from the first language, all of which interfered with fluency and clarity. External conditions such as lack of English exposure outside the classroom, limited parental involvement, and minimal institutional support further hindered their progress. Despite these difficulties, students showed a strong desire to improve their speaking skills, suggesting that motivation is a vital factor in language development. Effective teaching should therefore combine emotional support, meaningful communication tasks, and consistent speaking practice. Schools and teachers are encouraged to create more immersive environments using authentic materials and digital tools. Although limited by its focus on a single school and self-reported data, this study offers useful insights for similar educational contexts. Future research should include broader school settings and long-term observation to better understand how speaking ability can be improved over time.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix 1.

The interview protocol of 10 open-ended questions aimed at extracting comprehensive insights from secondary school English teachers concerning students' difficulties and progress in speaking English. The inquiries addressed fundamental aspects like evaluation methodologies, motivating and environmental factors, classroom engagements, and techniques to alleviate nervousness and enhance oral communication. The questions were designed to permit flexible responses while adhering to the study's objectives, ensuring the depth and usefulness of the obtained data. Before the interviews, the procedure was evaluated by language education specialists to guarantee clarity, suitability, and conformity with the research objectives. The following are the interview questions.

1. What are secondary school students' main challenges when speaking English?
2. How do you assess the English-speaking skills of your students in the classroom?
3. In your experience, what specific factors (e.g., motivation, language proficiency, classroom environment) most affect students' ability to speak English confidently?
4. How often do you provide opportunities for students to practice speaking English during class? Could you describe the types of activities you use?
5. Do you observe any differences in how students engage with speaking English depending on their grade or age? If so, what are they?
6. What strategies or methods have you found to be effective in helping students overcome their fear of speaking English?
7. Are there any common mistakes students make when speaking English that you feel are difficult to correct?
8. How does peer interaction improve students' speaking skills, and how do you encourage this in your classroom?
9. How do you address students' lack of confidence or anxiety when speaking in English, especially in group or public settings?
10. In your opinion, what additional support or resources would benefit both students and teachers to improve English speaking skills in secondary education?