

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the research by outlining the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, and a review of related previous studies.

A. Research Background

This study investigates student engagement in speaking lessons within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, focusing on how participation supports the development of speaking proficiency. Speaking, as a key language skill, contributes to fluency and self-confidence. Yet, many students face challenges such as anxiety, limited language ability, and minimal classroom experience, which often reduce their involvement. Engagement in speaking activities involves cognitive, behavioural, and emotional aspects, all of which are shaped by how teachers deliver material and establish a supportive learning environment. When lacking these elements, students may lose motivation and struggle to develop their communicative competence. Thus, this research aims to examine the factors influencing engagement in speaking lessons to enhance instructional strategies and learning outcomes.

Speaking lessons play a vital role in EFL instruction by developing students' fluency, communication skills, and confidence through structured and interactive language use. These lessons provide opportunities for students to apply vocabulary and pronunciation in meaningful contexts. Mcleod (2024) explains that social learning emphasises that students improve speaking through peer interaction, while Piaget J (2014) constructivist theory supports the idea that active participation in verbal tasks enhances understanding. This is reflected in classroom activities such as discussions, debates, role plays, and simulations. Collaborative speaking tasks increase student involvement and build confidence (Musa et al ,2021). Since speaking requires real-time communication and feedback, regular participation in these activities is essential for developing communicative competence in EFL settings.

On the other hand, student engagement is a key element in the success of speaking instruction, as it directly affects classroom interaction. As explained by Sharma (2024), the use of digital tools offers more interactive ways for students to communicate and collaborate, helping reduce hesitation. Beyond technology, effective material delivery, helps address common challenges such as anxiety and lack of fluency (Hibatullah, 2019). Engagement in speaking lessons involves cognitive, behavioural, and affective aspects, which influence how students participate (Hasdina et al, 2024). Despite these strategies, some students face difficulties due to fear or disinterest. Speaking anxiety and low motivation, highlighted by (Amaliah 2019; Christy, 2021) often lead to reduced participation. Therefore, speaking lessons must improve language ability and create supportive conditions that sustain student engagement.

Preliminary observation conducted at an English language course revealed several challenges related to student engagement in speaking lessons. Only a few students were actively involved in discussions or oral tasks during class activities, while others remained silent or hesitant to participate. Many students showed signs of speaking anxiety, lack of confidence, or low motivation, especially when required to perform in front of others. Despite having structured speaking activities, the observed teaching methods did not fully address students' affective needs or create an environment that supported open and consistent communication. This condition highlighted a gap between instructional delivery and student involvement in speaking tasks. Based on these initial findings, the topic of student engagement in speaking lessons was chosen to examine how teaching approaches, classroom conditions, and learner-related factors influence participation. By focusing on this issue in the context of an English course, the research aims to generate insights that can contribute to more effective speaking instruction, particularly in non-formal educational settings where individualised learner attention is often possible.

Previous studies have explored various factors affecting student engagement in speaking lessons. Amaliah (2019) revealed that speaking anxiety often hinders students

from participating actively, while Christy (2021) noted that a lack of interest leads to low involvement in class activities. In a broader context, in a longitudinal study, Aubrey et al. (2022) emphasised that task design and student motivation influence engagement during speaking tasks. However, they did not specifically address differentiated strategies for diverse learner levels. Despite these insights, few studies have examined how specific teaching methods can accommodate high and low proficiency students in speaking classes. This research addresses that gap by investigating how pedagogical approaches can be adapted to enhance engagement across different learner profiles in EFL instruction.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background and the issues, this research seeks to investigate the factors related to student engagement in speaking lessons. To guide the investigation, the following research questions are:

1. What teaching strategies do the teachers use to create engaging speaking lessons in English courses students with different English levels?
2. How does the levels of engagement differ between high and lower English proficiency students in speaking lessons?
3. What factors influence students' levels of engagement in speaking lessons?

C. Research Purposes

Referring to the research questions above, this study is intended to achieve specific objectives related to student engagement in speaking lessons. The purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To identify teaching strategies do the teachers use to create engaging speaking lessons in English courses students with different English levels.
2. To describe does the levels of engagement differ between high and lower English proficiency students in speaking lessons.
3. To know factors influence students' levels of engagement in speaking lessons.

D. Research Significances

Student engagement is recognized as a critical factor in successful speaking instruction. This study explores engagement through cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions, particularly in the context of students with varying speaking proficiency levels. Speaking activities in EFL classrooms often reveal different patterns of engagement between high- and low-proficiency students. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to English language education.

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the academic discourse on student engagement in EFL contexts by examining how engagement is demonstrated across different proficiency levels. Insights into the interaction between pedagogical strategies and learner engagement are also expected to be gained. The findings may reference future research on learner-centered instruction, especially in speaking skill development.

2. Practical Significance

This study has practical significance for several important stakeholders, including:

a. Teacher

This study is intended to serve as a reflective tool for teachers in evaluating their speaking lesson practices. Strategies that support engagement among low and high proficiency students are expected to be identified. Classroom environments are encouraged to be adapted to promote interaction, confidence, and equal participation.

b. Students

From the student's side, this research is expected to raise awareness of how engagement influences speaking development. By recognizing personal barriers such as anxiety or low confidence, students are encouraged to take more active roles in classroom interaction.

E. Research Scope

This research is limited to investigating student engagement in speaking lessons at a private English language course in Indonesia. It examines how engagement is demonstrated by low- and high-proficiency students (categorized as Beginner, Intermediate levels) through the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions. The focus is on how teachers' teaching strategies influence student engagement during speaking activities.

F. Conceptual Framework

Speaking lessons are central to EFL instruction by facilitating authentic language use and promoting oral fluency. These lessons allow students to practice speaking in meaningful contexts, such as group discussions and role plays, which help strengthen both linguistic skills and learner confidence. Piaget J (2014), through his constructivist perspective, explains that students construct knowledge more effectively when they actively engage with tasks. This approach aligns with classroom speaking activities, where students process ideas and co-construct meaning. Similarly, Mcleod (2024) emphasizes that social interaction, particularly peer collaboration, significantly supports language development in speaking-based instruction.

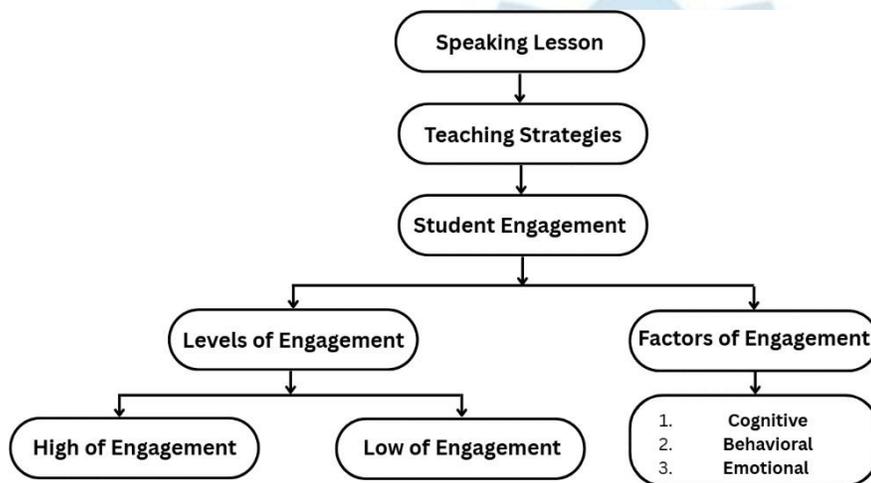
Teaching strategies influence how effectively speaking lessons engage students. Teachers who use peer feedback, collaborative group work, and scenario based role play often create environments that foster communication and engagement. Musa et al. (2021) observe that students demonstrate more active participation and fluency in discussion-based tasks. Additionally, Sharma (2024) notes that digital platforms such as video responses or interactive apps facilitate expressive opportunities, especially for students who may feel reluctant in traditional classroom settings. These strategies prove essential for accommodating both high- and low-proficiency students in speaking instruction.

As conceptualized by Hasdina et al. (2024), student engagement includes three core dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional. Cognitive engagement refers to

the learner's mental investment in meaningfully processing ideas and using language. Behavioral engagement appears in participation, task completion, and verbal contribution during lessons. Emotional engagement reflects interest, confidence, and connection to the learning experience. When all three aspects interact, students display

higher levels of involvement, take initiative, and sustain their attention throughout oral tasks.

Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework



Several internal and external factors shape the level of student engagement. Amaliah (2019) shows that speaking anxiety frequently prevents students from participating in class, especially when they fear making mistakes. Christy (2021) points out that a lack of interest in the lesson topic often leads to passive behavior. Language proficiency also determines how students engage, as noted by Karabıyık (2019), who highlights that high-proficiency students tend to respond more confidently and frequently. In contrast, low-proficiency students often display hesitation and require differentiated support. Hibatullah (2019) adds that classroom dynamics, teacher approachability, and the learning environment contribute substantially to shaping students' comfort and willingness to participate in speaking tasks.

G. Previous Studies

This section provides an overview of previous research that explores student engagement in speaking lessons within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The focus of these studies lies in examining how affective, cognitive, and behavioral factors influence student participation during speaking activities. In particular, previous research highlights the role of speaking anxiety, learner motivation, task type, and digital tools in shaping engagement levels. Some studies also consider how student proficiency contributes to different patterns of involvement. Although these investigations provide valuable insights into individual aspects of engagement, comprehensive studies that integrate engagement dimensions with pedagogical practices and learner differences remain limited.

To begin with, Amaliah (2019) conducted a quantitative study to examine the relationship between speaking anxiety and student engagement. The research involves 150 university students in an EFL environment and uses structured questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. The design is correlational, focusing on how the frequency and intensity of speaking anxiety influence students' willingness to speak during class discussions and presentations. The questionnaire measures anxiety indicators and participation patterns, aiming to identify statistical links between psychological factors and oral performance.

Moreover, Christy (2021) adopts a mixed-method approach that combines surveys and interviews to investigate the impact of interest on speaking engagement. The study includes 200 EFL students' who participate in structured speaking lessons. The research instruments consist of Likert-scale surveys to capture students' attitudes and levels of interest and open-ended interview questions to explore students' personal experiences and motivational drivers. This study offers a multidimensional view of emotional engagement in speaking lessons by applying both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

In addition, Musa et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative case study focusing on collaborative speaking tasks and how they affect student involvement. The study involved 30 university students who participated in group discussions and peer interactions. Observation checklists and semi-structured interviews were used to assess how students responded to speaking activities in group settings. The researchers aimed to identify which types of collaborative tasks promote more active participation and engagement, especially among students with varied proficiency levels.

Furthermore, Sharma (2024) explores the role of digital technology in enhancing student engagement during speaking activities. The study involves 50 students and employs a qualitative design through classroom observations and follow-up interviews. The instruments include field notes and reflective questions, allowing the researcher to evaluate how students interact with digital tools such as language learning apps and online discussion platforms. This study also considers how technology can reduce hesitation and improve expressive confidence in speaking tasks.

The findings across these studies suggest consistent patterns. For instance, Amaliah (2019) reports that high levels of speaking anxiety reduce students' participation and negatively impact their performance during oral activities. Similarly, Christy (2021) shows that students with low interest in the topic demonstrate less emotional investment and withdraw from speaking interactions. On the other hand, Musa et al. (2021) find that collaborative group tasks increase speaking fluency and peer support, contributing to better behavioral and emotional engagement. Likewise, Sharma (2024) concludes that digital tools create a more interactive and supportive environment, allowing students to express themselves with reduced pressure and increased autonomy.

However, despite these contributions, several research gaps remain. Most existing studies focus on a single factor: anxiety, motivation, or task design without providing a holistic analysis that combines all engagement dimensions. Furthermore, there is

limited exploration of how teaching strategies are adapted to different learner profiles, particularly concerning high- and low-proficiency students. Few studies offer insight into the direct connection between instructional methods and engagement outcomes in speaking courses. In addition, many of the studies are situated within formal university settings and do not examine engagement within non-formal or course-based learning contexts. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on teaching strategies, learner differences, and engagement dimensions in speaking lessons conducted at a private English language course.

