

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Speaking is an important skill when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) which enables learners to share ideas, transfer information, react to others and participate in oral interaction (Ur, 2002; Richards, 2008). Speaking is difficult because students have to produce language directly and in real time (Thornbury, 2005). In a speaking activity, they have to generate ideas, select the right vocabulary, construct grammatical sentences, pronounce words accurately, be fluent and reply to another speaker in a limited time for preparation and editing of their speech (Harmer, 2007; Thornbury, 2005). However, speaking performance is not only based on students' knowledge of English but also their willingness to use that knowledge in classroom interaction (Ur, 2002).

Students may have language difficulties if their English language sources are limited. The usual challenges include selecting the right words, forming grammatically correct sentences, articulating words clearly and speaking fluently (Brown, 2004; Gan, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009). Such difficulties are reflected in long pauses, repeated words, self-correction, very short answers, unclear pronunciation, or inability to continue a response (Gan, 2012). Because these signs occur in actual attempts at speaking, they must be considered in the setting of the classroom where students are communicating.

Psychological factors can also be a cause of speech problems. Students who know the relevant words or sentence patterns may still hesitate or stay silent because they feel anxious, fear making mistakes, lack confidence, or have low motivation to participate (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1986). Foreign language anxiety can affect the difficulty to process language and willingness to communicate of students especially when they are asked to speak in front of teachers and classmates (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Recent research with junior high school students has identified limited vocabulary, speaking in front of the class, fear of being laughed at, fear of making mistakes, fear of mispronunciation, being the focus of attention and fear of failure in English tests as factors contributing to speaking anxiety (Prameswari et al., 2025). So, similar behaviour, like silence or hesitation, can be a sign of different difficulties and can't be read just by looking.

English is typically learned as a foreign language in Indonesia and is not commonly used in daily communication (Lauder, 2008). Therefore, the classroom becomes one of the main places where students can practice speaking English (Lauder, 2008). Hence, the English teacher has an important role in creating opportunities for oral interaction and giving support when students encounter difficulties (Richards, 2008). Classroom support may include modelling, feedback, scaffolding, communicative activities, pair or group work, encouragement, wait time and other support measures (Lantolf, 2000; Nation & Newton, 2009; Richards, 2008).

Previous studies have identified common speaking difficulties of EFL learners and discussed different strategies used by English teachers. Some studies in Indonesia have shown some problems such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, pronunciation problems, lack of fluency, anxiety, and lack of confidence (Putra et al., 2023; Rusdin & Purwati, 2023; Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Based on the research of Grade 8 students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, active learners, shy learners, and passive learners have different ways to use Indonesian language to overcome their limitations in vocabulary, problems in constructing sentences, and anxiety in speaking (Inayah et al., 2025). Other studies have referred to modelled talk, partner work, feedback and confidence building (Razi et al., 2021; Septiana & Rahayuningsih, 2022). Akmalia et al. (2026) recently conducted a study in an Islamic junior secondary school which used role play, group work, and language games but encountered problems in implementation such as low motivation, speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, reliance on the first language and limited facilities. Different types

of participation and verbal responses were found to follow teacher questioning. This implies that teacher actions affect classroom interaction (Rahmawati et al., 2024). The findings offer an important basis for understanding speaking difficulties and classroom support.

However, classifying challenges and strategies into separate groups doesn't fully capture their interplay in real classroom talk. Students' silence or hesitation may be due to limited vocabulary, anxiety, lack of ideas, misunderstanding of the task, or reliance on peers. The same behaviour can be a sign of different types of difficulty, so the teacher's response must be looked at in relation to the individual classroom situation. Understanding this connection requires direct observation of classroom interaction and confirmation through interviews with the teacher and students.

A preliminary observation in the selected Grade 8 classroom indicated that some students showed reluctance and limited readiness when they were required to perform orally in front of the class. During one oral activity, the students declined to read a projected paragraph from the front of the classroom and stated that they felt embarrassed, after which the teacher allowed them to read from their seats. In another speaking activity, one student was unwilling to present a personal experience individually, and the teacher adjusted the activity by allowing the student to present with a classmate. The teacher also provided preparation time when the students were not ready to tell their personal experiences orally without first organizing their ideas in writing. These initial episodes indicate that students' speaking challenges and the teacher's responsive adjustments can be examined as connected classroom phenomena. However, the specific reasons for the students' reluctance and need for support require further clarification through the main observations and interviews.

In this study, responsive strategies are defined as classroom actions used or adjusted by the teacher in response to an observed or confirmed speaking challenge. This definition is informed by the principle of contingency in scaffolding, which emphasizes that support should be adjusted to students' current understanding or difficulty (Van de Pol et al., 2010; Van de Pol &

Elbers, 2013). The term does not refer to every technique that is planned before the lesson. A strategy is considered responsive when the data show that the teacher selects, modifies, or provides particular support in relation to a specific speaking challenge. When relevant, students' subsequent responses are recorded as contextual information, but they are not treated as a separate focus of analysis or as evidence that a strategy is effective.

This study, based on the problem mentioned above, investigates the linguistic and psychological speaking challenges experienced by Grade 8 students, the responsive strategies used by the English teacher, and how those strategies are applied to particular challenges during classroom speaking activities. The study does not test a strategy for effectiveness, measure students' achievement in speaking, or establish a cause-and-effect relationship between teacher support and students' improvement. Instead, it offers a qualitative descriptive account of classroom interaction in its natural form. This approach is consistent with qualitative description, which seeks to give a direct and contextual description of a phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). Therefore, this study is entitled "Students' Speaking Challenges and Teacher's Responsive Strategies During English Speaking Activities in a Grade 8 EFL Classroom at Madrasah Tsanawiyah."

B. Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What speaking challenges do Grade 8 students experience during English speaking activities in the classroom?
2. What responsive strategies does the English teacher use to address the students' speaking challenges?
3. How does the English teacher apply responsive strategies to particular speaking challenges during classroom speaking activities?

C. Research Purposes

In line with the research questions, the purposes of this study are:

1. To identify speaking challenges experienced by Grade 8 students during

English speaking activities in the classroom.

2. To describe the responsive strategies used by the English teacher to address the students' speaking challenges.
3. To describe how the English teacher applies responsive strategies to particular speaking challenges during classroom speaking activities.

D. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to a contextual understanding of EFL speaking challenges and teacher support. It examines students' difficulties and the teacher's responsive strategies as connected classroom phenomena rather than as separate lists. By describing how a difficulty appears and how the teacher responds to it, the study may provide a clearer account of speaking interaction in the classroom. This contribution is descriptive and does not claim that any strategy is effective in every situation or produces long-term improvement.

Practically, the findings may help English teachers recognize different signs of speaking challenges and reflect on whether the support they provide is appropriate to the situation. For students, the study may contribute to a classroom environment in which their difficulties are understood without assuming that every instance of hesitation or silence has the same cause. For the school, the findings can provide classroom-based information for reviewing speaking activities and supporting teacher reflection. For future researchers, the challenge-strategy mapping used in this study may serve as a reference for further studies on classroom interaction and responsive support in other EFL contexts.

E. Research Scope

This study is limited to English speaking activities in one Grade 8 EFL classroom at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Pesantren Persatuan Islam 97 Cikajang, Garut Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The participants are the English teacher and the students in the selected class. The observed activities may include answering questions, practicing dialogues, participating in pair or group work, giving short oral responses, and taking part in other classroom speaking tasks.

The study does not investigate students' use of English outside the classroom or in extracurricular programs.

The students' speaking challenges are mainly examined through two categories. Linguistic challenges include limited vocabulary, grammatical problems, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of fluency (Brown, 2004; Gan, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009). Psychological challenges include anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and low motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1998). These categories guide the observations and interviews, but they do not prevent the researcher from recording other relevant explanations, such as lack of ideas, misunderstanding of instructions, unfamiliarity with the topic, or dependence on peers, when these patterns are supported by the data.

The teacher's responsive strategies refer to classroom actions used or adjusted in relation to an observed or confirmed speaking challenge. Possible strategies include modeling, feedback, scaffolding, communicative activities, pair or group work, encouragement, wait time, and other forms of classroom support. The unit of analysis is a classroom speaking episode that includes a student's speaking attempt, the challenge that appears or is later confirmed, and the teacher's responsive strategy. When relevant, students' subsequent responses are recorded in the field notes as contextual information, but they are not analyzed as a separate research focus. The study does not measure speaking scores, long-term improvement, or the effectiveness of any particular strategy.

F. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study connects two main elements in classroom English speaking activities: students' speaking challenges and the teacher's responsive strategies. Students' speaking challenges are examined as difficulties that appear or are reported during a speaking attempt. The teacher's responsive strategies are examined as forms of support used or adjusted in response to those difficulties.

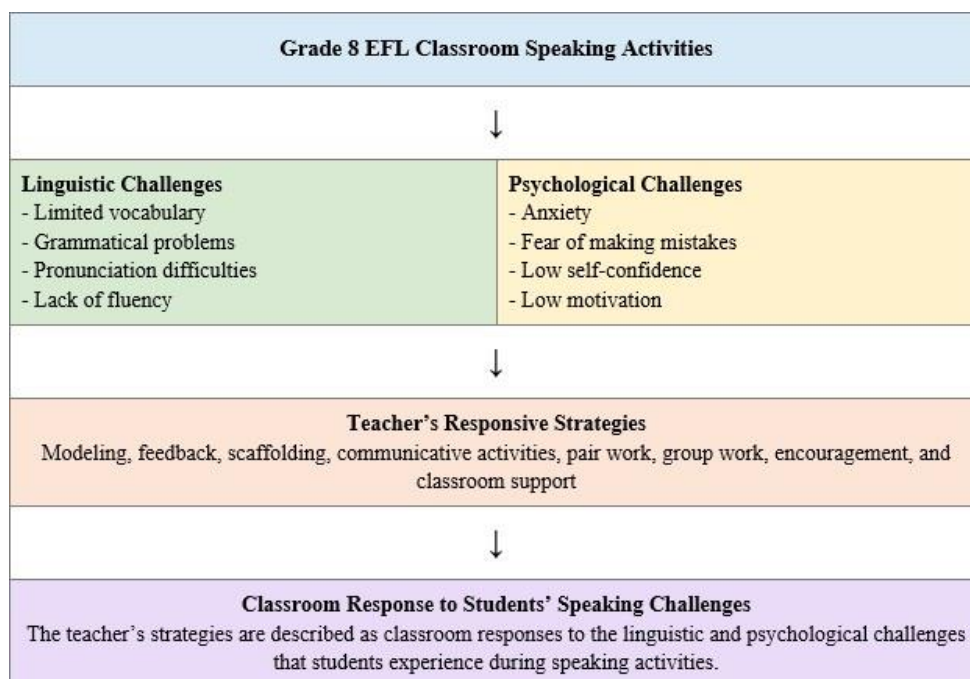
The speaking challenges are initially organized into linguistic and

psychological categories. Linguistic challenges include limited vocabulary, grammatical problems, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of fluency (Brown, 2004; Gan, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009). Psychological challenges comprise anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence and low motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Observation provides evidence of visible classroom behaviour and interviews are used to confirm experiences or reasons that cannot be reliably identified through observation alone.

Such strategies may involve modelling, feedback, scaffolding, communicative activities, pair or group work, encouragement, wait time, and other forms of support in the classroom (Lantolf, 2000; Nation & Newton, 2009; Richards, 2008). Responsiveness is interpreted according to the principle of contingency in scaffolding, which states that support is adapted to students' existing understanding or difficulty (Van de Pol et al., 2010; Van de Pol & Elbers, 2013). The framework does not assume that every planned teaching technique is responsive. A strategy is analyzed as responsive when it is connected to a specific speaking challenge that is observed or confirmed during a speaking episode.



The conceptual framework of this study can be described as follows:



The arrow in the framework shows the analytical connection between a speaking challenge and the teacher's responsive strategy, not a cause-and-effect relationship. The study does not claim that a particular strategy produces improvement in speaking ability. Instead, the framework guides the researcher in describing how a challenge becomes visible or is confirmed and how the teacher responds to it. This focus is consistent with qualitative descriptive research, which aims to present a direct and context-based account of a phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000).

G. Previous Studies

Studies of Indonesian EFL learners have identified vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, confidence and limited opportunities to practice as important speaking difficulties (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). The findings are in line with research that states linguistic and psychological factors such as pronunciation problems, limited vocabulary, grammar problems, anxiety, and low confidence (Putra et al., 2023). The studies are related to the present study in that they explore the problems encountered by Indonesian EFL learners. However, they focus mainly on the types and causes of the difficulties while

the present study also examines the teacher's responsive strategies in the same classroom interaction.

A mixed-method study of junior high school learners revealed that limited vocabulary, speaking in front of the class, fear of being laughed at, fear of making mistakes, fear of mispronouncing words, being the centre of attention, and fear of failure in English tests were the main reasons for speaking anxiety (Prameswari et al., 2025). The present study is similar to this study in that the study investigates psychological speaking problems among young EFL learners. However, it mainly discusses the anxiety levels, determinants and coping methods, and this study mainly discusses the teacher's response when linguistic or psychological problems occur in classroom speaking activities.

Research among secondary students in an Indonesian Islamic school categorized speaking problems into language, mental, personal, and educational dimensions (Rusdin & Purwati, 2023). The similarity with the present study lies in the secondary-level Islamic school setting and the attention given to several sources of speaking difficulty. The present study differs by focusing on linguistic and psychological challenges and by examining how the teacher responds to particular difficulties during observed speaking activities.

The research involved nine Grade 8 students at MTsN 4 Sidoarjo, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. found that active, shy, and passive learners used Indonesian in different ways when facing vocabulary limitations, sentence-construction difficulties, and speaking anxiety (Inayah et al., 2025). This study is quite similar to this research as it deals with Grade 8 learners in a Madrasah Tsanawiyah context and employs classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. However, it focuses on the role of Indonesian in reducing anxiety, whereas the present study investigates a wider range of linguistic and psychological challenges together with the teacher's responsive strategies.

Research on junior high school teachers has described strategies used to support speaking instruction (Razi et al., 2021). The study is relevant because it examines teacher strategies at the same general educational level. However,

the present study does not examine strategies only as general classroom practices. It analyzes a strategy as responsive when it is connected to an observed or confirmed speaking challenge. This distinction is consistent with the principle of contingency, which highlights that support is responsive when it is adapted to the current difficulty of the learner, and not only when the type of strategy used is identified (Van de Pol et al., 2010; Van de Pol & Elbers, 2013).

A study on an English teacher's strategies for building students' confidence found that partner work, modelled talk, and supportive speaking activities were utilised (Septiana & Rahayuningsih, 2022). The research design is based on observation and interviews, which is methodologically similar to the current research. The present study is different in that both linguistic and psychological challenges are examined, and the connection between the teacher's support and specific challenges is made within classroom speaking episodes.

A case study on two Grade 8 English teachers in an Islamic junior secondary school recently reported the use of role-play, group work and language games (Akmalia et al., 2026). The study also found low motivation, speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, frequent first language use and limited instructional facilities as challenges of implementation (Akmalia et al., 2026). This research is relevant, as it investigates the same grade level and a similar Islamic school context. However, it focuses on teachers' strategies and implementation challenges. The present study links specific student challenges with responsive strategies used by the teacher.

Small-group discussion has also been examined as a strategy for supporting speaking activities (Sulistianingsih & Prawiyata, 2023). The study is relevant because peer interaction can provide more opportunities to speak and create a less threatening environment. However, the present study does not treat small-group discussion or any other strategy as an experimental treatment. Such practices are examined only when they appear as part of the teacher's response to students' classroom difficulties.

A case study in a non-formal speaking class investigated teacher questions and students' verbal responses (Rahmawati et al., 2024). The relevance of the study is that it shows that certain teacher behaviour may influence participation and verbal response. However, the present research is conducted in a formal Grade 8 EFL classroom and examines how the English teacher applies responsive strategies to particular speaking challenges across classroom speaking activities.

The previous studies provide important insights into students' speaking difficulties and teacher support in EFL contexts. Many previous studies have examined speaking challenges by identifying their types, causes, or psychological factors, while some studies have described teacher strategies as classroom practices. Although these studies provide valuable understanding of EFL speaking problems and classroom support, limited attention has been given to how specific speaking challenges that emerge during classroom speaking activities are addressed through particular teacher responses in real classroom interaction.

Therefore, this study differs from previous studies in terms of its focus and unit of analysis. Instead of only identifying students' speaking challenges or describing teacher strategies separately, this study examines classroom speaking episodes to explore how students' linguistic and psychological speaking challenges are addressed through the teacher's responsive strategies. Through classroom observations and interviews with the teacher and students, this study provides a contextual description of how teacher support is selected, adjusted, and applied in response to particular speaking difficulties in a Grade 8 Madrasah Tsanawiyah classroom.