

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study, which serves as the foundation for understanding the research focus and its significance. The chapter begins with the background of the study, which explains the issues related to students' lack of self-confidence in speaking activities and the importance of teachers' strategies in addressing this problem within EFL classrooms. It is followed by the research questions and research purposes that guide the direction of the study. In addition, this chapter discusses the significance of the research for teachers, students, and future researchers.

The scope of the study is also presented to clarify the boundaries of the research. Furthermore, the conceptual framework is provided to illustrate the relationship between the key concepts discussed in the study. Finally, previous studies are reviewed to identify research gaps and demonstrate how the present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge. Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study and establishes the rationale for investigating teachers' strategies to overcome less-confident students in speaking activities in EFL classrooms.

A. Background of the Study

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it enables learners to communicate ideas, express opinions, and interact meaningfully in both academic and real-life contexts. Unlike receptive skills such as reading and listening, speaking requires learners to produce language spontaneously while maintaining accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. Brown (2001) defines speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Due to its interactive and immediate nature, speaking often becomes the most demanding skill for EFL learners.

However, in many EFL classrooms, students frequently demonstrate reluctance when required to speak English. Rather than actively participating in oral activities,

some students hesitate, avoid eye contact, speak in very low voices, or completely refuse to respond. These behaviors suggest that difficulties in speaking are not solely caused by limited vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. In many cases, psychological factors—particularly low self-confidence—play a significant role in shaping students' willingness to communicate.

Harmer (2007) explains that affective factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-esteem significantly influence students' oral performance. Students may possess sufficient linguistic knowledge but remain silent due to fear of negative evaluation from teachers or peers. In EFL contexts such as Indonesia, where opportunities to use English outside the classroom are limited, students often lack authentic communicative exposure. As a result, speaking English in front of others may feel intimidating, which further decreases their confidence.

Low confidence in speaking can create a cycle of limited participation. When students rarely speak, they receive fewer opportunities to practice and improve. This lack of practice may lead to slower development of speaking skills, which in turn reinforces their insecurity. This situation is commonly found in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students are generally more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions in Bahasa Indonesia because it is the language they use in their daily interactions. In contrast, speaking English often requires greater effort, preparation, and confidence. Consequently, many students become hesitant when they are expected to communicate orally in English, particularly during classroom speaking activities. As a result, teachers face the dual responsibility of teaching speaking skills while simultaneously fostering students' confidence. In this context, teaching speaking is not merely about delivering language input but also about creating supportive conditions that encourage students to take risks in using English.

Preliminary classroom observations at MTs Darul Hufadz revealed that several eighth-grade students tended to show signs of low confidence during speaking lessons. Some students avoided volunteering, provided minimal responses, relied heavily on their first language, or depended on more confident peers. These behaviors suggest that the challenge in speaking activities extends beyond linguistic

limitations and involves affective dimensions. In such situations, teachers are required to implement specific strategies that not only develop speaking competence but also enhance students' confidence.

To address these challenges, teachers play an important role in creating supportive learning environments and implementing instructional strategies that encourage students to participate more actively in speaking activities. Although numerous studies have examined students' speaking difficulties in EFL contexts, many of them focus primarily on linguistic problems or the effectiveness of certain teaching techniques.

The issue of students' low confidence in speaking is also closely related to classroom culture, interaction patterns, teacher support, and learning experiences that shape students' willingness to communicate. However, studies that specifically explore how teachers strategically support less-confident students in speaking activities remain relatively limited. Understanding teachers' strategies is important because teachers' decisions, classroom management, and feedback approaches directly influence students' confidence development. Therefore, this study aims to explore English teachers' strategies to overcome less-confident students in speaking activities in EFL classrooms, particularly at MTs Darul Hufadz.

Teachers' beliefs about language learning also influence how speaking instruction is conducted and how students' confidence develops in the classroom. When speaking is understood as a gradual developmental process, teachers are more likely to provide scaffolding, structured guidance, and consistent encouragement for less-confident learners. Conversely, when speaking activities emphasize accuracy and immediate correction, students with lower confidence may feel exposed or discouraged. Confidence development should also be viewed as a dynamic process that evolves through classroom interaction, learning experiences, and teacher support.

Students' willingness to speak may vary depending on task type, peer interaction, or the level of preparation provided. Some students may participate actively in pair or small-group discussions but withdraw during whole-class presentations. Structured activities that include modeling, vocabulary support, and

guided prompts may help reduce anxiety compared to spontaneous speaking tasks. Examining how teachers adjust their strategies across different speaking situations therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of how less-confident students can be effectively supported in EFL classrooms.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, this research focuses on exploring the strategies used by English teachers to support less-confident students in speaking activities in the EFL classroom. To address this focus, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies do English teachers use to overcome students' low confidence in speaking activities in EFL classrooms?
2. How are these strategies implemented in classroom practice?
3. What challenges do English teachers face in implementing strategies to overcome less confident students in speaking activities?

C. Research Purposes

In line with the research questions, this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of how English teachers support less-confident students in participating in speaking activities in the EFL classroom. Specifically, the purposes of this study are:

1. To explore and describe the challenges experienced by English teachers in teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms.
2. To investigate how English teachers address and cope with challenges encountered during speaking instruction.
3. To identify the challenges English teachers face when implementing strategies to support less-confident students in speaking activities.

D. Research Significances

This study is expected to provide significant contributions both theoretically and practically in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, particularly in relation to speaking instruction at the secondary school level.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on EFL pedagogy by offering an in-depth understanding of English

teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills. While previous studies have largely focused on students' speaking difficulties or the effectiveness of specific teaching techniques, this study emphasizes teachers' lived experiences and instructional realities. By examining teachers' challenges through a qualitative lens, the study enriches discussions on speaking pedagogy within sociocultural and communicative language teaching frameworks. The findings are expected to support and extend theoretical perspectives proposed by scholars such as Vygotsky, Brown, and Harmer, particularly regarding the role of teacher mediation, classroom interaction, and affective factors in speaking development.

Practically, this study provides valuable insights for English teachers, especially those teaching in EFL contexts similar to MTs Darul Hufadz. By identifying common challenges faced in teaching speaking skills, such as students' low participation, anxiety, limited linguistic resources, and classroom management issues, this research may help teachers reflect on their own instructional practices. The strategies employed by teachers to address these challenges can serve as practical references for other educators who encounter similar difficulties in their classrooms. As a result, teachers may become more aware of alternative approaches to fostering students' oral participation and confidence in speaking English.

Furthermore, the findings of this study may be beneficial for schools and educational institutions. Understanding teachers' challenges can assist school administrators and curriculum developers in designing more supportive teaching environments, providing relevant professional development programs, and allocating adequate resources for speaking instruction. This is particularly important in EFL settings where opportunities for authentic English communication are limited.

Finally, this research may serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring speaking instruction, teacher challenges, or qualitative studies in EFL contexts. The insights gained from this study can inspire further research that examines similar issues in different educational levels or institutional settings, thereby contributing to the continuous improvement of English language teaching practices.

E. Research Scope

This study is deliberately limited in scope to ensure a focused and in- depth exploration of the research phenomenon. The scope of this research centers on English teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills in an EFL classroom context.

In terms of participants, this study involves two English teachers at MTs Darul Hufadz who have more than five years of teaching experience. The teachers are selected purposely because of their direct involvement in teaching speaking skills and their familiarity with the classroom context. This study does not involve students as primary participants; however, students' classroom behaviors and responses are observed as part of the teaching–learning process to support the analysis of teachers' challenges.

Regarding the instructional focus, this research specifically examines challenges related to teaching speaking skills, rather than other language skills such as reading, writing, or listening. The speaking activities observed in this study are limited to general and functional oral communication tasks commonly taught at the junior secondary level, including daily conversations, expressing opinions, and simple descriptive speaking. More advanced speaking tasks, such as formal presentations or debates, are beyond the scope of this study.

In terms of educational level, this research is confined to eighth-grade students in an EFL classroom setting. The selection of this level is based on the assumption that students at this stage have already received basic English instruction but still face significant challenges in developing oral communication skills.

Methodologically, this study is limited to a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as the primary data collection techniques. Quantitative data, experimental designs, or statistical measurements of speaking achievement are not included, as the focus of the study is on understanding teachers' experiences and perspectives rather than measuring learning outcomes.

By setting these boundaries, this research aims to provide a clear, contextualized, and meaningful understanding of English teachers' challenges in

teaching speaking skills without attempting to generalize the findings beyond similar EFL classroom contexts.

F. Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the assumption that teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms is a complex process influenced by pedagogical, linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors. The conceptual framework of this research is designed to explain how English teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills emerge and how these challenges are shaped by classroom interaction and instructional practices.

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is Sociocultural Theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978). From a sociocultural perspective, language learning is viewed as a socially mediated process in which knowledge is constructed through interaction between teachers and learners. Speaking development does not occur in isolation; rather, it is facilitated through meaningful communication, scaffolding, and guided participation within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In this framework, teachers function as mediators who support students' speaking development by providing appropriate guidance, feedback, and interactional opportunities.

However, the process of mediation is often constrained by various classroom realities. Teachers may encounter challenges related to students' limited linguistic resources, such as insufficient vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, and weak grammatical control. These linguistic challenges can restrict students' ability to express ideas orally and increase their dependence on teachers' support. Brown (2001) emphasizes that speaking involves not only linguistic competence but also strategic and discourse competence, which require continuous practice and feedback. When classroom conditions do not allow sufficient speaking practice, teachers may struggle to facilitate effective oral communication.

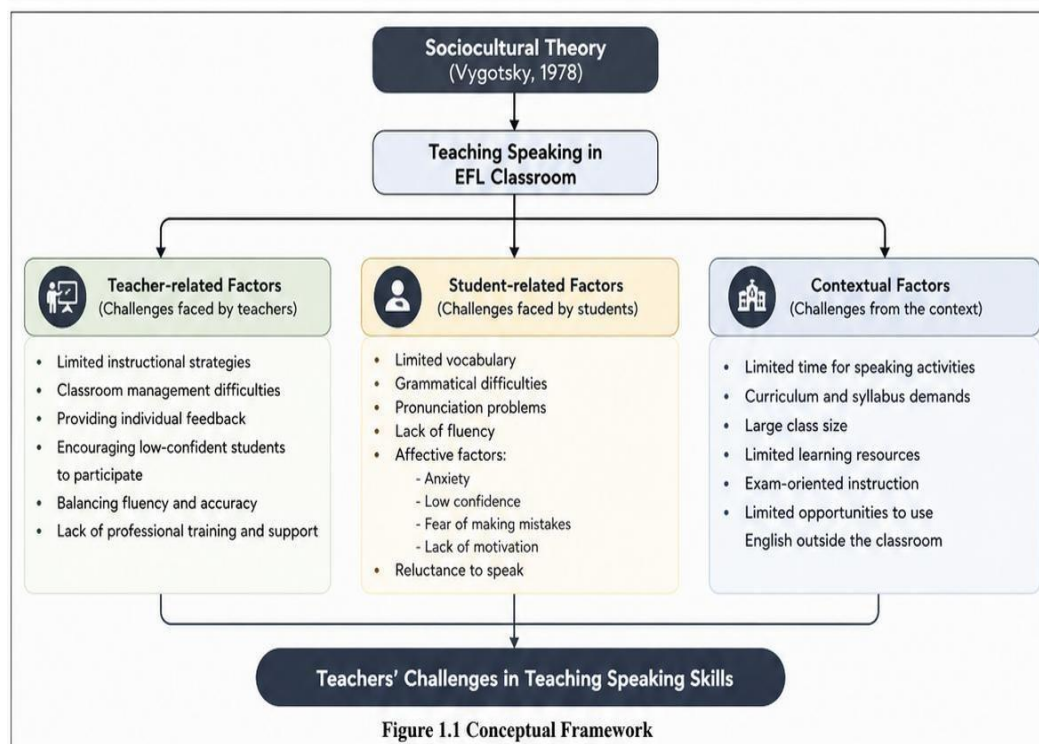
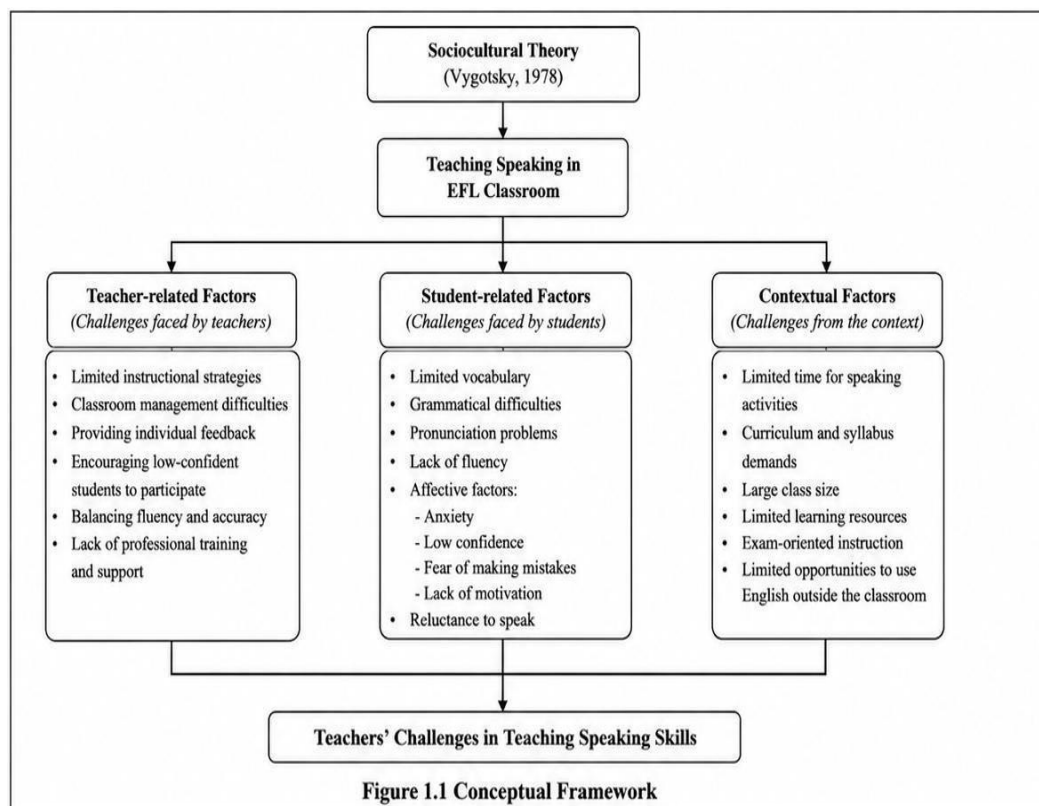
In addition to linguistic factors, affective factors play a significant role in shaping speaking instruction. Harmer (2007) highlights that anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence often prevent students from actively participating in speaking activities. These affective barriers can create classroom situations in

which teachers find it difficult to encourage student interaction and sustain meaningful communication. Consequently, teachers must balance corrective feedback with emotional support, which can be challenging in large or heterogeneous classrooms.

Classroom interaction and management are also central components of this conceptual framework. Richards (2008) argues that successful speaking instruction requires well-managed classroom interaction patterns, including pair work, group work, and teacher–student interaction. However, managing these interactional activities can be challenging when students have varying proficiency levels or limited motivation. Teachers may face difficulties in ensuring equal participation, maintaining classroom discipline, and allocating sufficient time for speaking practice within the constraints of the curriculum.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills as the result of the interaction between teacher-related factors (such as instructional strategies and classroom management), student-related factors (such as linguistic limitations and affective conditions), and contextual factors (such as time constraints and curriculum demands). These challenges influence how speaking activities are implemented in EFL classrooms and how teachers respond to students' needs.

The conceptual framework guides the data collection and analysis of this study by providing a lens through which teachers' experiences and classroom practices are interpreted. By integrating sociocultural theory as the main framework and supporting insights from Brown, Harmer, and Richards, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms.



G. Previous Studies

Previous studies related to the teaching of speaking skills in EFL classrooms have highlighted various challenges faced by English teachers, particularly in secondary school contexts. These studies provide important references for understanding the complexity of speaking instruction and serve as a foundation for the present research.

Several studies have identified linguistic challenges as a major obstacle in teaching speaking. A study by Al Hosni (2014) in Oman, particularly among second-year students who experienced difficulties in learning English speaking skills, found that EFL learners often struggle with limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, and weak grammatical competence, which hinder their ability to communicate orally. As a result, teachers face difficulties in encouraging students to speak fluently and confidently during classroom activities. This finding supports Brown's (2001) view that speaking competence requires the integration of multiple language components, which are often underdeveloped in EFL contexts. More recent research has also highlighted the importance of developing speaking ability alongside learners' confidence in using English, particularly in EFL contexts (Mega & Sugiarto, 2020).

In addition to linguistic factors, psychological and affective challenges have been widely reported. Tuan and Mai (2015) in Vietnam involved secondary students in an EFL classroom setting. This research revealed that students' anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-esteem significantly reduce their willingness to participate in speaking activities. These affective barriers place teachers in a challenging position, as they must create a supportive classroom atmosphere while simultaneously achieving instructional objectives. Similarly, Harmer (2007) emphasizes that affective factors can be more influential than linguistic competence in determining students' speaking performance. This perspective is supported by Nety et al. (2020), who found that anxiety, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of vocabulary can contribute to students' lack of confidence in speaking English.

Classroom management and interactional challenges have also been discussed

in previous research. Rahman (2017) in Indonesia involved English teachers at the junior high school level conducted a qualitative study on English teachers in Indonesian junior high schools and found that managing large classes and diverse proficiency levels made it difficult for teachers to implement interactive speaking activities. Teachers reported challenges in organizing pair and group work, maintaining student engagement, and ensuring equal participation. These findings align with Richards' (2008) assertion that effective speaking instruction requires well-structured interaction patterns, which are not always easy to implement in real classroom settings.

From a sociocultural perspective, several studies have emphasized the role of interaction and scaffolding in speaking development. Nguyen (2018) in an EFL classroom context, particularly in Vietnam, involved English teachers as participants and explored teachers' roles as mediators in EFL classrooms and found that while teachers understood the importance of scaffolding, they often struggled to provide appropriate support due to time constraints and curriculum demands. This study highlights a gap between theoretical understanding and classroom practice, which is particularly relevant to the present research.

In the Indonesian context, Sari (2020) in Indonesia involved English teachers at the junior secondary school level examined English teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills at the junior secondary level using a qualitative approach. The study revealed that teachers faced interconnected challenges related to students' low motivation, limited exposure to English, and rigid curriculum requirements. Teachers often relied on teacher-centered instruction due to limited instructional time, which reduced opportunities for students to practice speaking. This finding further reinforces the need for an in-depth exploration of teachers' challenges within specific institutional contexts.

Despite the growing number of studies on speaking instruction, most previous research has focused either on students' difficulties or on the effectiveness of specific teaching techniques. Studies that specifically explore teachers' challenges from their own perspectives, particularly using classroom observation and in-depth interviews, remain limited. Moreover, few studies have explicitly employed

sociocultural theory as a guiding framework to interpret teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills at the madrasah level. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by conducting an in-depth qualitative exploration of English teachers' challenges in teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms. By focusing on teachers' experiences at MTs Darul Hufadz and employing sociocultural theory as the main framework, this research aims to complement and extend previous studies while offering contextualized insights into speaking instruction challenges

