

Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Students' Speaking Difficulties in English: A Case Study of Eighth Grade Students at MTsN 1 Mataram

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Abstract

This research is based on the understanding that difficulty speaking English as a foreign language is a complex phenomenon involving various factors. This study aims to identify the speaking difficulties faced by eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mataram and to analyze the strategies used by English teachers to overcome those difficulties. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. The participants consisted of two English teachers and six eighth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. The data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that students experienced several speaking difficulties, namely limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, and pronunciation challenges. Among these difficulties, limited vocabulary was identified as the most dominant factor affecting students' speaking performance. To overcome these problems, teachers implemented various strategies and role-play was found to be the most effective in overcoming students' speaking difficulties. Role-play provided students with opportunities to practice vocabulary, sentence construction, and pronunciation in meaningful contexts while increasing their confidence and participation. Other strategies, such as small group discussions, storytelling, and games, also supported students' speaking development. Overall, the study indicates that role-play is the most effective strategy in addressing students' speaking difficulties. This study reinforces previous findings that limited vocabulary is a major obstacle in learning to speak English in EFL contexts at the junior secondary level. This finding implies that teaching interventions need to prioritize vocabulary enrichment as a foundation before expecting students to be able to produce fluent and accurate speech.

Keywords: Teachers' Strategies, Speaking Difficulties, MTsN 1 Mataram.

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INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that plays a vital role in various aspects of life (Ali, 2022). Therefore, English language skills, particularly speaking skills, are crucial for students at all levels of education (Pao, 2019). In the context of learning English as a Foreign Language, speaking skills are often the biggest challenge students face (Chand, 2021). Many students struggle with speaking English due to various factors, such as psychological, linguistic, or environmental factors (Al Hosni, 2014).

As a result, students tend to be passive and reluctant to participate in classroom speaking activities, ultimately slowing down their speaking skills (Ahmad, 2021). In this regard, teachers play a crucial role in helping students overcome these difficulties. The teaching strategies implemented by teachers can have a significant impact on improving students' speaking skills. Through the use of varied methods, communicative approaches, motivation, and the use of appropriate learning media, teachers can create a learning environment that supports students in speaking English actively and confidently.

MTSN 1 Mataram is an Islamic Junior High School which is located at Pembangunan Street, Dasan Agung Baru, Mataram. English is one of the compulsory subjects being taught here and speaking is the most often-used language skill and is seen as a priority for student because speaking allows students to actively engage in meaningful communication, both inside and outside the classroom, making it a critical skill for academic success, social interaction, and future professional opportunities. According to Richards (2008), "Developing speaking skill is essential for classroom participation and real-life communication." Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978), defines "Speaking not only as a means of communication, but also as a means of thinking. Inner speech develops through social speech, and this supports the cognitive development of students." With good speaking skills, students can convey their ideas, opinions, and feelings clearly and in a structured manner, whether in class discussions, presentations, or everyday interactions. Speaking skills also help boost self-confidence, especially when they have to speak in public or communicate with others. Furthermore, these skills support language acquisition, especially in foreign language learning, as students are trained to pronounce words correctly, use proper grammar, and expand their vocabulary. In the long run, effective speaking skills will be a vital asset in the workplace and social life, where oral communication plays a key role. Therefore, speaking skills need to be developed consistently from the time students are in school. Speaking ability is considered an important communication skills and must be actively developed and also as a guide for teaching and learning English in this school in curriculum especially in terms of speaking, the eight-grade students are expected to the purpose of teaching English in this level is to develop students' potential in order to have communicative competence of interpersonal, transactional, and functional discourse by using oral and written text in English (Koran, 2015).

Based on the observation at that school, it was found that many eighth-grade students of MTSN 1 Mataram still faced significant difficulties when attempting to speak English. These challenges often stem from various factors. Baker and Westrup (2003, p. 12) stated that, "There are some difficulties that may cause low ability in speaking such as the students' linguistic knowledge, students' motivation, and speaking materials." These components are the core elements of language competence, and deficiencies in any of them can hinder oral communication. For example, students with limited vocabulary may struggle to find the right words, while poor pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, grammatical errors can affect clarity and coherence, making it difficult for listeners to understand the speaker's intent (Afrilahadi, et al., 2025). In addition to these linguistic challenges, psychological factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes also significantly impact students' speaking. These psychological barriers often

exacerbate language difficulties, causing students to hesitate or even avoid speaking with others, which further hinders their ability to practice and develop.

While Hibatulloh et al (2024) study of the task-based approach through a literature review provides a broad overview of the approach's adoption in Indonesia, it does not provide in-depth empirical data on how strategies such as role-play are implemented concretely in the classroom, particularly in addressing multidimensional speaking difficulties. Meanwhile, Ulpa et al (2025) study at Cambridge English School Makassar provides valuable insights into strategies for building student confidence. However, the context of a language school with relatively better resources differs significantly from the context of a public Islamic junior high school (MTs), which has its own limitations and challenges.

This study at MTsN 1 Mataram fills this gap with several specific contributions. First, it explores in-depth the implementation of speaking teaching strategies in the context of a junior high school (madrasah tsanawiyah) – a level of education that has received relatively little attention in the Indonesian EFL teaching literature, despite its unique characteristics, such as learning time allocation, student backgrounds, and curriculum demands, which differ from those of public schools. Second, unlike previous studies that tended to document strategies in general, this study specifically identified the combination of strategies used by teachers – role-play as the core strategy, supported by small group discussions and games – and analyzed how these three strategies synergistically addressed three dimensions of speaking difficulties (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) simultaneously. Third, this study provided a comparative analysis of the relative effectiveness of the various strategies implemented, finding that role-play proved most effective because it provided a semi-real communication context that allowed students to practice all aspects of language while building confidence – a finding that complements previous studies that tended to document the effectiveness of strategies in isolation without direct comparison.

Therefore, Teachers must use various strategies in teaching speaking to make students enthusiastic in the teaching process. According to Brown (2001), "A teaching strategy is a combination of learning techniques systematically designed to achieve optimal learning outcomes. This strategy involves various aspects, such as method selection, media use, time management, and teacher-student interaction." Teachers must carefully select strategies that encourage active student participation, build communicative competence, and address common speaking challenges. Effective speaking strategies can create a supportive learning environment where students feel more confident and motivated to practice using English in real-life situations. These strategies may include activities that encourage real-time communication. Sarifudin and Setyawan et al (2021) revealed that "The use of techniques such as role-playing, drilling, and creative task can improve students' speaking skills." Meanwhile, Abrar and Widiati (2022) found that "Teachers use memorization, drilling, asking questions, and group discussion in teaching speaking." By using a variety of methods and speaking-based learning strategies, it can help students become more confident in expressing their thoughts verbally (Buddhi, 2025).

Incorporating a variety of teaching strategies enables teachers to effectively respond to the diverse challenges that students encounter in learning to speak

English. Through these strategies, teachers can not only enhance students' linguistic competence but also foster their confidence to communicate meaningfully in real situations. Given the importance of speaking as a core skill in language learning, it becomes crucial to examine how teachers implement specific approaches to assist students in dealing with the difficulties they experience during speaking activities.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. The purpose of employing this design was to explore in detail the strategies used by teachers to address students' speaking difficulties in English, particularly among eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mataram. The case study approach was selected because it enables researchers to examine a phenomenon within its real-life context. Through this method, the research aimed to describe and analyze how teachers applied strategies to help students overcome challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Additionally, the qualitative descriptive approach provided opportunities to collect rich and comprehensive data through observations, interviews, and documentation, offering a deeper understanding of the strategies implemented within the school setting.

Research Subjects

The population of this study consisted of English teachers and eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mataram. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, involving two English teachers who teach classes VIII-D and VIII-H, as well as six eighth-grade students, with three students from each class. The teachers were chosen because they are directly involved in teaching speaking and implementing strategies to overcome students' speaking difficulties, while the students were selected to represent common speaking problems encountered in English learning. This sample was considered appropriate for obtaining in-depth data related to teachers' strategies in overcoming students' speaking difficulties.

Research Instruments

This study employed observation and interviews as research instruments. Classroom observation was conducted to obtain direct data on teachers' strategies in overcoming students' speaking difficulties. An observation sheet was used to record teachers' instructional practices and students' responses during speaking activities, allowing the researcher to collect firsthand and contextual data relevant to the research objectives.

Research Procedures

This research was conducted through several systematic procedures to obtain valid and reliable data. The first step involved determining the research site and participants. The study was carried out at MTsN 1 Mataram, with two English teachers and six eighth-grade students selected as participants using purposive sampling. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the participants were directly involved in the teaching and learning process of speaking skills. After selecting the participants, the researcher prepared research instruments, including observation sheets and semi-structured interview guidelines, which were designed based on the research objectives focusing on students' speaking difficulties and teachers' strategies in overcoming those difficulties.

The next step involved data collection and analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to identify students' speaking difficulties and to observe the strategies applied by teachers during the teaching and learning process. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out with both teachers and students to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Finally, the findings were interpreted to draw conclusions regarding the dominant speaking difficulties faced by students and the most effective strategies used by teachers, particularly the implementation of role-play in improving students' speaking performance.

Data analysis

The data collected from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) data analysis model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, focusing, and simplifying information related to students' speaking difficulties and the strategies employed by teachers. This process allowed the researcher to eliminate irrelevant data and concentrate on key issues relevant to the research objectives.

After data reduction, the data were organized and presented in descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. The researcher then drew conclusions by interpreting the displayed data to answer the research questions, supported by verification procedures such as triangulation between observation and interview data to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Difficulties Faced by Eighth Grade Students at MTsN 1 Mataram in Speaking English

1. Limited Vocabulary as the Primary Difficulty

Based on the interview and Classroom observation results showed that limited vocabulary were the most dominant difficulty.

As T1 stated: *"One of the biggest problems is simply lack of vocabulary... when they are asked to speak, they often pause, look for words, or end up speaking in Indonesian because they can't find the right English word."* This explanation shows that vocabulary shortage not only affects students' fluency but also leads them to switch to their first language when they are unable to retrieve appropriate English words.

Similarly, T2 also highlighted vocabulary limitation as the primary issue affecting students' speaking performance: *"Many students struggle primarily because they don't have enough vocabulary... they pause, hesitate, or even switch back to Bahasa because they can't find an English word that fits."* This response indicates that students frequently stop in the middle of speaking, experience hesitation, and eventually shift to their first language when they cannot recall appropriate vocabulary.

The results of the student interviews and classroom observation also showed that limited vocabulary was repeatedly mentioned as the main difficulty experienced during speaking activities. Two students from class VIII D and two

students from class VIII H reported similar challenges. Students from both class expressed similar challenges when asked about the factors that made speaking English difficult for them.

S1 stated, "*I think the biggest difficulty is vocabulary. Because I don't have enough vocabularies.*" This response shows that S1 felt unable to speak fluently because the lack of vocabulary prevented him from expressing ideas clearly.

Similarly, S3 mentioned, "*Sometimes I make mistakes with vocabulary, cause I have less vocabulary*" This indicates that S2 often struggled to select the correct words while speaking, which affected his ability to deliver accurate and meaningful sentences.

S5 also expressed a similar concern, stating, "*Vocabulary is the hardest part for me. Sometimes I want to say something, but I stop because I don't know the word, so I can't continue speaking.*" This response shows that S3 frequently hesitated or paused because he could not recall the necessary words to complete his speech.

In addition, S6 mentioned, "*I get stuck because I forget the vocabulary, I can't say what I want.*" This statement indicates that S4 often found it difficult to continue speaking when he was unable to remember the English vocabulary needed to express his thoughts.

Observation findings also confirmed these statements, during classroom observations, students were often seen hesitating when asked to answer questions or participate in speaking activities. Some students paused for long moments, searched for words silently, or reverted to Bahasa Indonesia when they could not remember the correct English terms. These behaviors clearly illustrate that limited vocabulary significantly hampers students' ability to communicate effectively, affecting both their fluency and confidence in using English. Overall, the students' responses demonstrate a consistent pattern in which insufficient vocabulary becomes a major barrier to fluency, accuracy, and idea expression during speaking activities.

2. Grammar and Sentence Structure Difficulties

In addition to limited vocabulary, T1 also mentioned that students also face difficulties in grammar and sentence structure.

As T1 stated : "*Even though students know some words, sometimes they don't know how to put them together correctly to form meaningful sentences. As a result, their speech sounds unnatural or unclear.*" T1 also reported that students have difficulties in arranging words into correct and meaningful sentences. The teachers explained that, although students recognize certain vocabulary items, they often struggle to organize these words into proper sentence structures. This issue makes their spoken responses sound less natural during classroom activities. Furthermore, a student from class VIII D expressed a similar sentiment:

As S2 mentioned : "*I think grammar. I know words, but I don't always know how to put them together in a sentence.*" The S2 mentioned that even though they know several English words, they often feel unsure about how to arrange those words into correct sentences. This challenge makes them hesitate when speaking and affects their ability to express ideas smoothly during classroom activities.

This finding is supported by classroom observations. Students were often seen pausing or stopping while trying to form complete sentences. Some rearranged words or spoke in short, broken sentences because they were unsure about the

grammar. These observations show that difficulties in constructing sentences make it hard for students to speak smoothly.

3. Pronunciation Challenges

In addition, T2 highlighted pronunciation problems as one of the factors that hinder students' speaking performance.

As T2 mentioned: "*English has sounds that don't exist in Indonesian, so students sometimes pronounce words awkwardly or incorrectly, and that makes them feel insecure.*" This explanation shows that several English sounds do not exist in Indonesian, which makes it difficult for students to pronounce certain words correctly. This issue also affects their confidence, as some students become hesitant to speak when they are unsure about how to pronounce specific words. T2 mentioned that this problem frequently appears when students read aloud, answer questions, or participate in class discussions.

Furthermore, A student from grade VIII H also reported experiencing difficulties with pronunciation during speaking activities.

S3 emphasized that, "*Pronunciation is difficult because it is different from our daily language here, and I often mispronounce them.*" This response shows that the student still struggles to produce correct English sounds and the student still experiences challenges in adapting to English sounds that differ from those used in everyday communication. The student admitted that certain words are particularly hard to articulate, especially those containing sounds that are uncommon in their first language. Because of this, S3 sometimes hesitates before speaking, unsure whether they are saying the words correctly

These issues were also seen during classroom observations, Students were frequently seen mispronouncing words, pausing to think about pronunciation, or asking the teacher for help with difficult sounds. Some students spoke slowly and carefully, trying to get the pronunciation right, while others avoided certain words they found hard to pronounce. These behaviors confirmed that pronunciation difficulties not only affect the accuracy of their spoken English but also make them hesitant and less confident during speaking activities.

Strategies used by the teachers in overcoming difficulties faced by eighth grade students of MTsN 1 Mataram in speaking English

1. Role-play to Build Real-world Speaking Experience

Based on interview and observation results, Teacher 2 stated that role-play is the most effective strategy for overcoming students' speaking difficulties. As T2 stated, "*I find role-play is the most powerful strategy when it comes to helping students get over their speaking problems... they practice speaking seriously in a semi-natural setting, so they become more confident and fluent.*" This statement indicates that role-play helps students practice real-life communication while reducing anxiety. According to T2, role-play provides a safe environment for students to practice vocabulary and sentence structure, which gradually improves their fluency and confidence.

Classroom observations supported this finding. When students performed role-play activities on asking and giving opinions, they appeared more enthusiastic, actively participated, and were brave in constructing sentences, using new vocabulary, and paying attention to pronunciation.

Student interview data also revealed similar perceptions. S1 stated, "*I think role-play, because I can try new role and find new vocabularies.*" This shows that role-play

helps students explore new vocabulary and gain confidence. Similarly, S4 mentioned, "*I like role-play because I learn new words and I get to use them when speaking.*" In addition, S5 stated, "*Role-play and games are very helpful because I can speak without worrying too much.*" Meanwhile, S6 explained that role-play helps them remember vocabulary, improve sentence structure, and become more enthusiastic, especially when working with friends. Overall, role-play encourages active participation and effectively supports students' speaking development.

2. Small Group Discussions as a Means to Encourage Active Student Participation in Speaking Activities in Class.

Based on the interview and observation results, T2 specifically explained that small group discussions are seen as the effective strategy to help students overcome their difficulties.

As T2 stated : "*In my experience the thing that works best for overcoming students' speaking difficulties is small group discussion. When I break the class into small groups, suddenly even the quieter or more nervous students feel safe to speak up because it's less intimidating than speaking in front of the whole class. In those small groups, they share ideas, try English sentences, ask each other questions, and this also has an impact on increasing students' understanding, adding new vocabulary, learning correct grammar, and learning correct pronunciation. because it becomes more like a discussion among friends than a test, i've seen that after a few sessions of small-group talk, students start using more English, even the ones who rarely volunteered before.*" This statement shows that small group discussions help students feel more comfortable and confident when speaking English. T2 observed that students actively participate, share ideas, and practice sentences in a supportive environment. Furthermore, small group discussions help student in linguistics factors including limited vocabulary, incorrect grammar, and mispronunciation. This also aligns with classroom observations, which showed that when T1 divided students into small groups, they appeared more focused and actively engaged in discussions. They interacted with each other more fluently, trying to construct new sentences, and responding to each other in English. Teacher provide opportunities to practice language in a safe, interactive setting, even students who are usually shy or hesitant become more willing to speak, and overall English usage in the classroom increases after several small group sessions.

Furthermore, two students from class VIII D gave similar responses, explaining that participating in small group discussions allows them to practice speaking more actively.

As S2 mentioned, "*I like small group discussions because I can try sentences without being scared.*" This response shows that small group discussions help S2 feel more comfortable and less anxious when speaking English, he student also has the opportunity to practice constructing sentences correctly, which supports the improvement of their sentence structure, allowing them to practice sentences more confidently.

S3 also emphasized that, "*Small group discussion really helps because I can talk with my friends using words I've learned.*" This statement indicates that small group discussions provide students with opportunities to apply newly learned vocabulary in speaking activities, which supports their language development and active participation in class.

3. Games as a Supportive Strategy in Speaking Activities.

As revealed in the interviews, both T1 and T2 stated that they use games to create a fun learning environment.

T1 stated that, "*Games make the class feel enoyable, like using wordwall, they end up talking more, even if their English isn't perfect.*" This statement shows that incorporating games in the classroom helps students feel more relaxed and motivated to speak. Classroom observations in class VIII D showed the same thing as T1 explained. When teachers used games like Wordwall, students seemed more confident in speaking, actively using new vocabulary, even if their English is not completely accurate, students participate more actively, practice speaking freely, and gain more opportunities to use English in a comfortable and enjoyable environment.

T2 supported this view by stating that, "*Games make the class feel fun, when we turn vocabulary or speaking tasks into a game such like describe the picture atau story cubes, students aren't afraid to make mistakes. They laugh, interact, and use English more freely. Because they enjoy it, they end up speaking more, and that practice helps them get more fluent over time*" This statement illustrates how games function as an affective filter reducer. By turning speaking tasks into enjoyable activities, students feel more comfortable practicing new words, constructing sentences correctly, and improving their pronunciation. And from the classroom observation also revealed that students participate with less fear of making mistakes, interact more with their peers, and gradually improve their fluency through repeated practice in a fun setting

Furthermore, one student from class VIII D and one student from class VIII H gave similar responses in line with T1 and T2 :

S5 emphasized that, "*Games are very fun because I can speak without worrying too much, and I can learn new words while playing.*" This response shows that games create a relaxed environment where students feel comfortable practicing English and expanding their vocabulary.

S3 also mentioned, "*And the game is also engaging because we can interact while joking and learning.*" This statement indicates that games make speaking activities more interactive and enjoyable, allowing students to communicate freely, collaborate with peers, and practice language in a playful and motivating setting.

The findings of this study confirm that limited vocabulary is the most dominant difficulty experienced by eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mataram in speaking English. This phenomenon can be explained through the theoretical framework proposed by Levelt (1989) in the speech production model, which states that the speaking process involves the stages of conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. In the formulation stage, the speaker accesses the mental lexicon to select appropriate words for the message to be conveyed. When students have limited vocabulary, this formulation process is disrupted, leading to hesitation pauses and failure to complete utterances—as observed in this study when students stopped mid-sentence or switched to Indonesian.

Furthermore, the finding that grammatical and pronunciation difficulties also hampered students' speaking ability aligns with the theory of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980). Within this framework,

speaking competence requires not only grammatical competence (knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical rules, and pronunciation) but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Research findings indicate that students at MTsN 1 Mataram are still struggling at the grammatical competency level, thus unable to access higher competencies. This is evident from teachers' statements that students know words but do not know how to arrange them into meaningful sentences – an indication that passive lexical knowledge has not been proceduralized into active production skills.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the most significant speaking difficulty faced by eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mataram is limited vocabulary, followed by difficulties in grammar and pronunciation. Limited vocabulary was found to be the main barrier that causes hesitation, lack of fluency, and low confidence in expressing ideas orally. Regarding instructional strategies, role-play emerged as the most effective strategy in overcoming students' speaking difficulties. Role-play allows students to practice vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation in semi-realistic communication contexts, which directly addresses their main linguistic problems. In addition, small group discussions effectively support students in practicing sentence construction and using new vocabulary in a less intimidating environment, while games help reduce anxiety and increase engagement, encouraging students to speak more freely. Overall, the findings indicate that strategies emphasizing meaningful communication, peer interaction, and enjoyable learning activities, particularly role-play, are effective in improving students' speaking performance, confidence, and motivation. Therefore, the consistent use of role-play, supported by small group discussions and games, is highly recommended to address students' speaking difficulties.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be proposed for English teachers, students, and future researchers. English teachers are encouraged to continue implementing role-play and small group discussions, as these strategies have been proven effective in improving students' vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking English. Teachers are also advised to provide sufficient preparation and scaffolding, such as introducing relevant vocabulary and model sentences before speaking activities, to reduce linguistic barriers. In addition, the use of fun and interactive activities, including language games and storytelling, is recommended to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and increase students' motivation to participate actively. Students are encouraged to actively engage in role-play, small group discussions, and games, as these activities provide meaningful and safe opportunities to practice English in real-life contexts. They are also advised to consistently develop their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation both inside and outside the classroom to enhance fluency and confidence. Furthermore, future researchers are suggested to explore other teaching strategies or combinations of methods, including the integration of technology or digital media, as well as to conduct studies in different educational levels or school contexts to obtain broader insights into effective strategies for overcoming students' speaking difficulties.

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