

**ENGLISH SPEAKING LEARNING STRATEGIES: A CASE STUDY OF EFL LEARNERS AT ONE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN JAMBI**

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**Abstract**

As a foreign language and a medium for global engagement, the ability to communicate effectively in English is one of the most essential skills for university students in Indonesia. However, speaking in English remains one of the most challenging competencies to master due to psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors. This study investigates the learning strategies employed by EFL learners at one public university in Jambi in improving their English-speaking skill, using a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five English Education students at a public university in Jambi. Their results of the study revealed that motivation, self-confidence, peer interaction, media exposure, and consistent practice are key strategies that support their speaking development. The findings highlight the importance of integrating both cognitive and socio-affective strategies in English speaking pedagogy and suggest the need for supportive learning environments that encourage authentic communication.

**Keywords:** Case study, English speaking, learning strategies, EFL learners, university students.

**INTRODUCTION**

Speaking is widely recognized as the most crucial skill for communication in any language. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), including in Indonesia, speaking competence is not only a marker of language proficiency but also an essential skill for academic and professional success (Abrar, 2022; Richards & Reynanda, 2002). As globalization intensifies, Indonesian university students are increasingly required to engage in academic presentations, international conferences, student exchanges, and virtual collaborations that demand effective English communication.

Despite years of English instruction in schools and universities, many students still struggle to express themselves fluently and confidently in spoken English. Studies (e.g., Al Hosni, 2014; Tuan & Mai, 2015) have shown that EFL learners often experience anxiety, lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and limited exposure to authentic communication. In Indonesia, English is taught mostly in formal classroom settings where the focus remains on grammar and written forms rather than communicative competence (Zhou & Niu, 2015). Consequently, many students develop strong reading and writing skills but weak oral proficiency.

Learning strategies play a crucial role in language acquisition. Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as specific actions or techniques that learners use to enhance their learning process. These include cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social, and compensation strategies.

In speaking, learners may use strategies such as repetition, paraphrasing, self-talk, or asking for clarification to facilitate communication. However, strategy use is often influenced by personal experiences, motivation, cultural context, and the learning environment (Griffiths, 2008).

Previous studies (e.g., Nakatani, 2006; Alharbi, 2015; Kassem, 2018) have explored how EFL learners use speaking strategies such as monitoring, self-evaluation, and social interaction. These studies typically employ quantitative or mixed methods to identify the most frequently used strategies. Yet, there remains a gap in understanding **how** and **why** students adopt certain strategies, especially from their experiences. Case study, as a qualitative approach, provides a deeper understanding of these processes by focusing on the learners' experience (Abrar, 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, this study intends to answer the following question: *What speaking learning strategies are used by EFL learners at a public university in Jambi?*

## METHODS

This study employed qualitative method with a case study approach to explore EFL students' experiences in learning English speaking. This method is considered appropriate to be used in this inquiry because it can provide a detailed and comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon of interest (Abrar, 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hennink et al., 2020; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Moreover, a case study approach is a qualitative tradition which is intended to comprehensively explore, describe, and analyze a case or a bounded system (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). In other words, this approach generates a detailed and comprehensive investigation of a real-life context case and/or phenomenon. Moreover, this design facilitated the researchers to portray and explain the case or phenomenon of interest holistically. Therefore, qualitative inquiry with a case study approach is best suited.

Four participants were purposefully selected from the English Education Department at a public university in Jambi, Indonesia. Purposeful sampling was used to identify students who had notable experiences and reflections about learning to speak English. All participants were in their fourth year of study, aged between 21 and 22 years. They had completed all speaking courses such as Listening and *Speaking for General Purposes*, *Speaking for Academic Purposes*, *Speaking for Professional Purposes* and *Advanced Listening and Speaking*. They also experienced challenges in speaking English when taking speaking courses.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Each interview lasted approximately 20–40 minutes and was recorded with consent. Follow-up questions were used to encourage deeper exploration. Participants were also asked to reflect on how their strategies was done in details. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions such as:

- “Can you tell me about your experience learning to speak English?” Please explain!
- “What do you usually do to improve your speaking ability?”
- “Can you share a moment when you felt your English speaking improved significantly?”

After the data were gathered, the next process was analyzing them by employing thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). It is a method of qualitative data analysis which identifies, analyzes and reports patterns in the form of themes within the data. The researchers started the analysis by familiarizing ourselves with the data. Several activities were done to familiarize the data, including listening to the recording, writing up data transcription, and reading the transcriptions multiple times. Then, the researchers generated the initial codes by highlighting colors and/or underlining important parts of the transcriptions. After that, the researchers began searching for themes by combining several codes into a single theme. The next step was

reviewing the themes by making sure of the accuracy and useful representations of the data. Henceforth, the researchers defined and named themes by interpreting the data and coming up with a name for each theme. Finally, the researchers produced the reports by writing the findings, discussions and conclusion parts.

To ensure credibility and to verify the accuracy of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researchers used the technique of member checking. The process of trustworthiness was by returning the transcription of interview data to all participants to cross check. Besides, researchers also shared data analysis and had intense discussion among us to ensure the accuracy of our interpretation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of participants’ data revealed several key themes that represent their strategies in learning and improving English speaking skills. These are summarized as follows:

Table 1. Key Theme of Study findings

Research Questions	Themes
What are the learning strategies used by EFL learners in learning and improving English speaking skill?	Motivation and Self-Regulated Efforts
	Social Interaction and Peer Learning
	Exposure to English Media and Technology
	Overcoming Psychological Barriers
	Developing Confidence through Experiences

### *Motivation and Self-Regulated Efforts*

Based on the transcriptions, all participants emphasized the importance of motivation as the driving force behind their efforts to improve speaking. For instance, Kila shared that her initial motivation came from her desire to participate in national and international programs. This triggers her to practice her English. She uttered:

“I wanted to join some programs, such as Kampus Mengajar, IISMA and SEA-Teacher program, so I knew I had to speak English well. That’s why I practiced every day, even talking to myself in front of a mirror.” (Kila)

Her self-motivation aligns with self-regulated learning theory (Zimmerman, 2000), which posits that successful learners set goals, plan strategies, and evaluate progress. Similarly, Raka, who initially feared speaking, set personal goals to record short English monologues and review them weekly to monitor improvement. He shared in his interview:

I used to be afraid and shy to speak English. I tried hard to speak English by recording the monologue. I planned it and did it consistently every week.” (Raka)

This finding reinforces earlier research (Abrar, 2023; Kassem, 2018; Griffiths, 2008) that motivation and self-regulation play central roles in language learning success. However, data from this study highlight that motivation among Indonesian students is often *situational* — triggered by opportunities (like competitions or exchange programs) rather than intrinsic desire. Therefore, lecturers can enhance speaking motivation by providing authentic communicative opportunities.

### ***Social Interaction and Peer Learning***

Regarding this theme, three participants reported that peer interaction significantly contributed to their speaking development. Fajar, for instance, described his experience working on group projects in English. His friends were very helpful by correcting his English. He specifically said:

“At first, we used Bahasa Indonesia, but then we agreed to switch to English. It was awkward, but over time, it became natural. My friends corrected me, and I corrected them.” (Fajar)

This aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist view that learning occurs through social interaction within the *zone of proximal development*. The participants’ experience reveal that informal peer learning (outside of the classroom) — such as chatting in English, practicing for presentations together, or joining English clubs — provided a supportive, low-anxiety space for practice.

Moreover, Nadia emphasized the emotional support from her peers as crucial in building confidence. She enthusiastically said that her friends supported her when speaking by finishing the sentences and suggesting words. She also told the interviewer(s) that her friends never laughed at her speaking. She commented:

“I always feel nervous when speaking, but my friends never laugh. They help me finish my sentences or suggest better words. That makes me more confident.” (Nadia)

These findings resonate with studies (Abrar, 2023; Alharbi, 2015; Liu & Jackson, 2008). Previous research consistently highlights that peer support and meaningful social interaction play a crucial role in shaping EFL learners’ speaking experiences. Together, these elements foster greater confidence and help reduce speaking anxiety among learners.

### ***Exposure to English Media and Technology***

Two participants reported using English movies, YouTube channels, and social media as tools for improving their speaking. They highlighted that technology is indeed helpful for them. To illustrate, Fajar described watching English talk shows and mimicking the speakers’ pronunciation and intonation helped him practice his English. In addition, Raka explained that using social media to post English-speaking videos as a way to practice in a real-world context. They mentioned:

“I often watch TED Talks. I pause, repeat, and record myself saying the same sentences. It really helps with pronunciation, new vocabulary and natural expression.” (Fajar)

“I like to post my English-speaking videos in my social media. I think it’s useful because I can get feedback from people who watch my videos”. (Raka)

These data show that the use of digital platforms reflects the increasing integration of technology in language learning. It supports autonomous learning, allowing students to control their pace, content, and context (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Additionally, these data highlight how

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informal learning environments complement formal education. The accessibility of English media provides authentic exposure, while interactive platforms encourage active speaking. For Indonesian learners, where real English-speaking environments are limited, media and technology serve as valuable substitutes.

### ***Overcoming Psychological Barriers***

One of the most prominent themes is psychological struggle, particularly anxiety, fear of mistakes, and low self-esteem. All participants acknowledged that they experienced the psychological issues when learning and practicing English speaking. All confessed that acknowledging the struggles help them overcome this issue. Kila and Raka openly shared:

“When I was in speaking courses, every time I spoke, my heart beat fast. I worried about grammar, and I felt people would judge me. But after some time, after acknowledging it, I realized that mistakes are part of learning.” (Kila)

“I had anxiety issue when speaking English, especially in front of public. Now, I can handle it by realizing it as a process of learning. Besides, I always practice and ask help from friends to overcome it” (Raka)

Their data transcriptions represent a common challenge among EFL learners. Speaking anxiety is a well-documented phenomenon (Abrar, 2022, 2023; Horwitz et al., 1986), and overcoming it requires affective strategies such as self-talk, relaxation, and positive mindset. Participants used various coping mechanisms: self-encouragement, preparation before speaking, and seeking supportive peers. This emotional transformation demonstrates how affective strategies shape language confidence. It also underscores the need for teachers to create a classroom culture that tolerates mistakes and promotes encouragement.

### ***Developing Confidence through Experience***

One participant noted that confidence was both a goal and a result of their speaking practice. Repeated exposure, participation in real communication, and teacher feedback contributed to their self-efficacy. Fajar reflected:

“The more I speak, the more confident I become. At first, I was nervous, but after several presentations, I realized I can handle it.”

This echoes Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that mastery experiences strengthen one’s belief in their ability to perform tasks successfully. The participant’s excerpt further illustrates this idea by showing how their confidence in speaking developed over time. Their stories suggest that speaking confidence is not instant but gradually built through consistent practice and positive experiences.

## **CONCLUSION**

This case study research explored the learning strategies used by EFL learners’ strategies to improve their English-speaking skills. By listening to their experience, the study revealed a rich, multifaceted process shaped by motivation, peer support, technology use, emotional challenges, and confidence-building experiences. Each participant’s experience demonstrated that learning to speak English is not a linear journey but a dynamic interplay between internal and external factors.

The study found that self-regulated motivation plays a foundational role in sustaining consistent practice. Students who set personal goals and monitored their progress reported higher improvement levels in speaking fluency and confidence. Furthermore, social interaction and peer learning emerged as powerful tools, enabling students to practice English in supportive, collaborative environments that lowered anxiety and promoted authentic communication.

Another significant finding was the influence of digital exposure and media engagement. Students actively utilized English movies, podcasts, YouTube, and social media as informal yet highly effective platforms to develop pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. This demonstrates the transformative potential of technology in providing access to authentic English use outside formal instruction — an essential resource in a foreign-language context like Indonesia.

Psychological aspects also played a central role in students' learning journeys. Anxiety, fear of mistakes, and self-doubt initially limited their participation. However, through affective strategies such as positive self-talk, peer encouragement, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks, students learned to reframe mistakes as learning opportunities. Over time, they developed a stronger sense of self-efficacy and linguistic identity.

Overall, the data demonstrate that English-speaking proficiency among EFL learners in a public university in Jambi is deeply personal and context-dependent. It is shaped not only by instructional factors but also by emotional resilience, social dynamics, and self-initiated practices. Therefore, language educators should adopt a more learner-centered, affective, and experience-based pedagogy. Teachers can support students' speaking development by encouraging reflective self-regulation and goal-setting, promoting collaborative peer activities and discussion clubs, integrating multimedia resources and digital storytelling in class, and creating a psychologically safe environment that values progress over perfection.

Although this study has comprehensively explained EFL learners' strategies in learning and improving English speaking, it is not to say that this study has no limitations. This study solely focused on the exploration of the students' perspective, and the lecturers were excluded. Future studies can explore the issue from the perspective of lecturers, such as lecturers' strategies in teaching speaking. In addition, this study has a relatively small sample and the data cannot be generalized. Future researchers may use a different method, e.g., quantitative, which possibly allows the researcher to employ more respondents and therefore the findings of the study can be generalized.

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