



Indonesian Students' Difficulties in Speaking English

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the persistent challenges faced by Indonesian students in developing English-speaking skills. The aim of the research is to analyze the primary barriers that hinder their speaking fluency and to offer effective pedagogical recommendations. The literature review was conducted qualitatively by collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant academic sources related to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Indonesia. The findings reveal that students generally struggle with vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and low self-confidence. In addition, the lack of exposure to authentic communication, teacher-centered instructional methods, and cultural norms contribute to students' reluctance to speak. Technological barriers, such as limited access to digital tools and the internet, further reduce speaking practice opportunities, particularly in rural areas. This study recommends the integration of communicative tasks into classroom routines, enhanced student engagement with authentic digital content, and the creation of a supportive learning environment where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process. These strategies are expected to improve students' fluency, motivation, and overall ability to communicate effectively in English.



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In the twenty-first century, the mastery of English has increasingly become a central requirement for individuals and nations to participate in the globalized world. English is no longer viewed simply as a foreign language but as a global lingua franca that connects people across borders in education, business, technology, and diplomacy. The ability to use English, particularly speaking skills, is often associated with upward social mobility, access to higher education, and competitive advantage in international job markets (Crystal, 2012). In this global context, English is positioned not merely as an academic subject but as a practical communicative tool that directly affects learners' future opportunities. Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), including Indonesia, English proficiency has become indispensable for regional

cooperation and integration. As Kirkpatrick (2010) notes, English serves as the primary medium of communication among ASEAN member states, making English-speaking competence a key factor for participation in cross-national exchanges.

In Indonesia, English is formally taught as a compulsory subject from junior high school to university, reflecting its recognized importance in national educational policy. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has consistently emphasized the development of communicative competence by adopting Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in its curricula. The rationale behind this policy is to move away from traditional approaches focused on memorization and grammatical drills toward methods that prioritize learners' ability to use English effectively in real-life contexts (Nurkamto, 2003). Despite this policy direction, however, the persistent challenge remains that Indonesian learners often perform poorly in speaking compared to other language skills such as reading and writing. Luoma (2004) identifies speaking as inherently more complex due to its real-time processing demands, spontaneity, and reliance on both linguistic knowledge and psychological readiness. These complexities are particularly evident in the Indonesian EFL context, where classroom practices and broader sociocultural factors often inhibit learners' oral proficiency.

A growing body of literature has documented the difficulties Indonesian EFL learners face in developing speaking skills. Studies by Rahmawati (2021), Pratiwi and Kusuma (2022), Franscy and Ramli (2022), and Fachrunnisa and Nuraeni (2022) reveal recurring obstacles, including limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, pronunciation problems, and low self-confidence. Psychological barriers, especially language anxiety, have consistently been identified as major deterrents to learners' willingness to speak (Horwitz et al., 1986; Tan, 2011). In addition, classroom practices often fail to provide sufficient opportunities for authentic speaking. Many teachers continue to rely on teacher-centered approaches that emphasize grammar explanation and written exercises, leaving little space for interactive tasks or meaningful dialogue (Lie, 2007). This pedagogical gap creates a mismatch between curricular objectives and actual classroom realities.

Technological advances present both opportunities and challenges for EFL speaking instruction in Indonesia. On the one hand, innovations such as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and online learning platforms have created new avenues for practicing oral communication beyond the classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Digital applications can provide immediate feedback, exposure to authentic language input, and opportunities for interaction with speakers worldwide. On the other hand, disparities in digital infrastructure between urban and rural schools mean that access to these resources is far from equitable. UNESCO (2021) has highlighted the persistent "digital divide" in Indonesia, where students in remote areas often lack both devices and stable internet connections. Consequently, while technology has the potential to enhance speaking practice, its uneven distribution further contributes to inequalities in language learning outcomes.

Sociocultural values also play a significant role in shaping Indonesian learners' attitudes toward speaking English. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) and Kirkpatrick (2010) point out that in many Asian societies, including Indonesia, cultural norms prioritize modesty, group harmony, and respect for authority. These norms often discourage students from speaking out in class, as frequent verbal participation may be perceived as showing off or challenging the teacher's authority. Such cultural expectations intensify learners' reluctance to practice speaking, particularly when combined with linguistic weaknesses and psychological anxieties. The silence observed in many Indonesian classrooms is

therefore not merely a reflection of linguistic incompetence but also a product of deeper sociocultural conditioning.

The interplay of linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, technological, and sociocultural factors creates a systemic web of constraints that collectively hinder the development of English-speaking skills among Indonesian learners. Previous studies have often examined these factors in isolation—for instance, focusing solely on language anxiety, teaching methodology, or technological integration. While these studies provide valuable insights, they risk overlooking the interconnected nature of the challenges. For example, a lack of vocabulary (a linguistic issue) can heighten language anxiety (a psychological problem), which in turn reduces students' participation in communicative activities (a pedagogical issue). Similarly, cultural norms discouraging verbal participation may be exacerbated in classrooms that rely heavily on teacher-centered approaches. Without an integrated perspective, it becomes difficult to design interventions that address the root causes of speaking difficulties holistically.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the literature on speaking difficulties in the Indonesian EFL context. By systematically reviewing and analyzing previous research, this study identifies recurring patterns and integrates insights across multiple dimensions—linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, technological, and sociocultural. This holistic approach is essential because it reflects the actual complexity of the challenges faced by learners and teachers in Indonesia. Instead of viewing speaking difficulties as isolated problems, this study conceptualizes them as interdependent phenomena that require multidimensional solutions.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, synthesizing existing research helps clarify how different factors interact to influence speaking development. For instance, the study highlights how linguistic mastery can reinforce psychological confidence, how pedagogical practices can mitigate or exacerbate cultural inhibitions, and how technology can either bridge or widen learning gaps depending on accessibility. From a practical perspective, the study's findings can inform teacher training programs, curriculum design, and classroom practices. Teachers who understand the interconnected nature of speaking difficulties will be better equipped to design communicative activities that simultaneously address linguistic accuracy, reduce anxiety, and respect cultural norms. Similarly, policymakers can use the findings to allocate resources more effectively, particularly in reducing technological disparities between schools.

In terms of research gap, this study responds to the lack of integrative analyses in the Indonesian EFL literature. While existing studies provide valuable empirical evidence on specific issues, few have attempted to bring together the multiple strands of research into a coherent synthesis. This gap is problematic because policymakers and practitioners often require a holistic understanding to design effective interventions. By filling this gap, the present study aims to move beyond fragmented discussions and offer a more complete picture of the challenges and possible solutions for improving speaking proficiency in Indonesia.

The objectives of this study are twofold. First, it seeks to identify the dominant factors that inhibit Indonesian EFL students' speaking skills by reviewing a wide range of academic sources. Second, it aims to propose pedagogical strategies that address these challenges in a contextually relevant and integrative manner. The guiding research question is: *What are the dominant factors inhibiting Indonesian EFL students' speaking*

skills, and what pedagogical strategies can effectively address these challenges? By answering this question, the study hopes to provide insights that not only advance academic understanding but also have direct implications for classroom practice.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader effort of enhancing English language education in Indonesia. In a world where English proficiency is increasingly tied to educational success, professional mobility, and global citizenship, the ability to speak English confidently and fluently is no longer optional but essential. For Indonesian learners, overcoming the intertwined barriers of limited linguistic competence, psychological anxiety, restrictive pedagogical practices, technological inequity, and cultural inhibitions is crucial. By shedding light on these challenges and offering practical strategies to address them, this study aims to support the development of a more inclusive, equitable, and effective EFL education system in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach through a library research design. The primary objective was to explore and synthesize various academic perspectives regarding the speaking difficulties experienced by Indonesian students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This non-experimental design did not involve fieldwork, surveys, or interviews. Instead, it focused entirely on analyzing secondary data from a variety of reliable academic sources.

The research was conducted between February and March 2025 at STKIP Muhammadiyah Pagaralam. During this period, the researchers accessed both online and printed academic literature through institutional and public databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. To ensure systematic selection, keywords such as “*EFL speaking difficulties*,” “*English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia*,” and “*students’ speaking problems*” were used. The inclusion criteria covered peer-reviewed articles, books, and conference papers published between 2018–2024, written in English, and directly addressing EFL speaking challenges in the Indonesian context. Sources outside this scope or lacking empirical evidence were excluded. Reliability was ensured through careful cross-checking of selected sources and thematic coding. Recurring themes were compared across studies to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the replicability of the findings.

Instruments and Procedures

The primary instrument employed in this study was a structured document analysis guideline. This guideline facilitated the identification, categorization, and interpretation of relevant information drawn from academic sources. It was designed to extract data on five key themes: vocabulary mastery, language anxiety, teaching strategies, exposure to authentic communication, and technological access, in the context of EFL speaking difficulties.

The document analysis procedure consisted of the following steps: In conducting the literature review, several systematic steps were followed. First, keywords such as “*speaking difficulties*,” “*language anxiety*,” “*EFL students in Indonesia*,” and “*communicative teaching methods*” were used to search databases and libraries for relevant literature. The sources were then screened for academic credibility, topical relevance, and recency, with priority given to publications from 2000 to 2024, particularly those from the last five years. Afterward, the selected data were organized into thematic

categories reflecting common challenges in EFL speaking instruction, including linguistic limitations, psychological barriers, pedagogical issues, technological constraints, and sociocultural factors. Finally, structured note-taking and inductive coding were applied to extract the core findings from each source, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and insights across multiple studies. This procedure ensured that the literature review was systematic, focused, and aligned with the study's objective of understanding the dominant barriers to speaking fluency among Indonesian EFL learners.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, which is consistent with the qualitative descriptive and library research design of this study. Since the data consisted of secondary sources rather than fieldwork or survey results, inductive thematic analysis enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns across the literature systematically. These patterns were then organized into broader themes such as linguistic limitations, psychological barriers, pedagogical constraints, technological obstacles, and sociocultural factors, providing a coherent synthesis of the reviewed studies. These themes were then interpreted to understand their implications for EFL speaking proficiency.

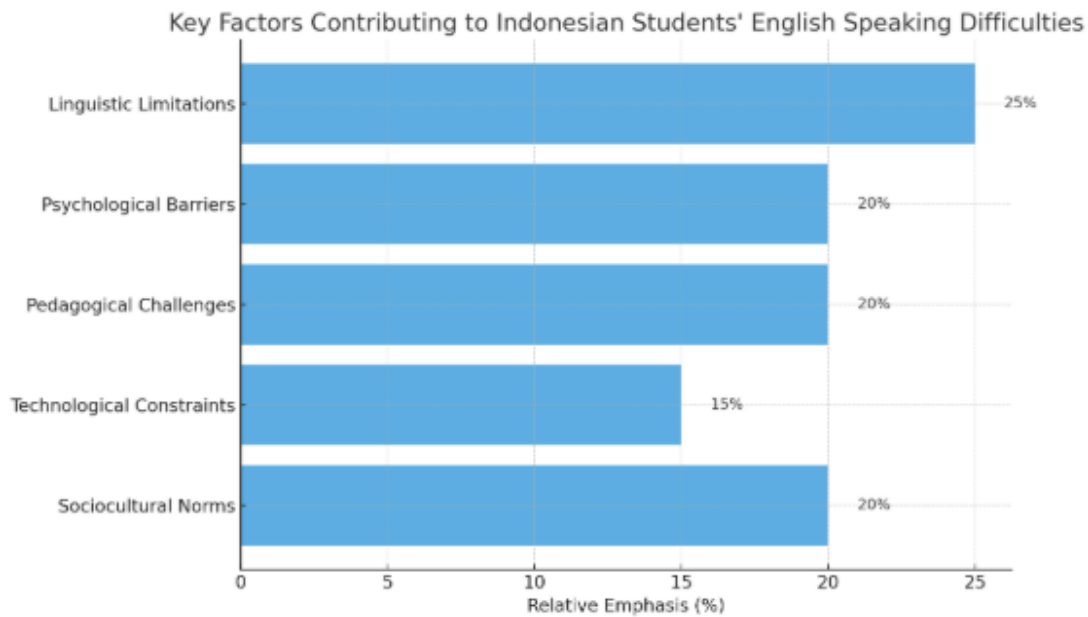
To ensure reliability, triangulation was applied by cross-verifying findings from various publication types peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and government or institutional reports. Repeated coding sessions were conducted to minimize subjective bias and increase the consistency of the thematic framework.

FINDINGS

The findings revealed five dominant factors contributing to Indonesian students' speaking difficulties:

Theme	Description	Key References
Linguistic limitations	Students struggle with vocabulary retrieval and grammatical accuracy.	Webb & Nation (2017); Schmitt (2010)
Psychological barriers	Fear of making mistakes and language anxiety reduce confidence.	Horwitz et al. (1986); Tan (2011)
Pedagogical challenges	Teacher-centered methods and limited speaking tasks hinder fluency.	Lie (2007); Harmer (2007)
Technological constraints	Lack of infrastructure and digital literacy blocks access to tools like MALL.	Godwin-Jones (2018); UNESCO (2021)
Sociocultural values	Cultural emphasis on modesty discourages verbal participation.	Cortazzi & Jin (1996); Kirkpatrick (2010)

Each factor did not stand alone but interacted with others, creating compounded speaking difficulties. In some schools, especially those in urban areas with better infrastructure and professional development programs, innovative teaching practices and the integration of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) have shown promising results. This underscores the importance of equitable support and localized pedagogical adaptation across different school contexts.



DISCUSSION

Linguistic and Psychological Interplay

The interrelationship between linguistic competence and psychological factors plays a central role in determining learners' ability to speak English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Linguistic mastery, particularly in the domains of vocabulary and grammar, is not only a technical requirement for producing accurate sentences but also a psychological foundation for building confidence. Thornbury (2005) emphasizes that spoken language proficiency relies heavily on learners' capacity to retrieve appropriate vocabulary quickly and to apply grammatical rules automatically in real-time interaction. When this capacity is limited, hesitation and communication breakdowns inevitably occur. For instance, an EFL learner who cannot recall the appropriate lexical item during a conversation may resort to silence, fillers, or code-switching, which disrupts fluency and diminishes self-confidence.

This hesitation is closely tied to psychological constructs such as language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz et al. (1986) describe language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety that interferes with the learning and production of a foreign language. In the Indonesian EFL context, recurring grammatical mistakes or the inability to retrieve vocabulary often led to embarrassment. These experiences reinforce a cycle of avoidance, in which students increasingly refrain from speaking to escape the possibility of public failure. As Dweck (2006) notes in her theory of fixed and growth mindsets, learners with a fixed mindset perceive errors as indicators of low ability. Consequently, rather than treating mistakes as learning opportunities, they withdraw from communicative situations, thereby reinforcing their linguistic stagnation.

The interplay of these factors has been observed in multiple Indonesian classroom studies. Marwan (2016), for example, reported that high levels of speaking anxiety among Indonesian undergraduates were primarily attributed to insufficient mastery of vocabulary and grammar. Similarly, Fitriani, Jalal, and Arifin (2015) found that students who perceived themselves as linguistically weak were more likely to avoid oral participation. These findings suggest that linguistic mastery does not operate in isolation; instead, it is filtered through learners' affective states. Without adequate vocabulary and

grammar, students' psychological resilience diminishes. Without psychological resilience, students are less willing to practice the language skills that would improve their vocabulary and grammar—a self-perpetuating cycle.

Another dimension of this interplay lies in the cultural context of Indonesian classrooms. Unlike in some Western educational traditions where verbal participation is highly encouraged, Indonesian students often experience additional psychological pressure due to sociocultural norms that value modesty and deference. Kirkpatrick (2010) highlights that many Asian learners perceive frequent speaking as a sign of arrogance or disrespect. When coupled with linguistic weaknesses, this cultural expectation intensifies silence, as students prefer to remain quiet rather than risk being judged for both their language mistakes and their perceived immodesty.

To address this linguistic–psychological nexus, pedagogical strategies must simultaneously strengthen students' linguistic resources and reduce their psychological barriers. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), for instance, provides a framework in which linguistic structures are practiced in meaningful interaction rather than through rote memorization. When learners engage in authentic dialogues, role-plays, or problem-solving tasks, they develop the automaticity needed to recall vocabulary and grammar spontaneously. However, the effectiveness of CLT depends on teachers' ability to create a supportive environment that normalizes mistakes as part of the learning process. Research by Tutyandari (2005) demonstrates that when Indonesian teachers adopted a more tolerant and encouraging stance toward students' errors, learners reported lower anxiety and greater willingness to communicate.

The psychological side of the equation can also be mitigated through strategies such as peer support, scaffolding, and positive reinforcement. For example, cooperative learning approaches allow students to practice speaking in smaller, less intimidating groups before performing in front of the whole class. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underscores the importance of scaffolding: learners can perform at higher levels when supported by peers or teachers, which gradually builds both competence and confidence. Over time, repeated successful speaking experiences in low-stakes settings foster the growth mindset that Dweck (2006) argues is critical for overcoming fear of mistakes.

Empirical evidence supports the notion that reducing psychological barriers can accelerate linguistic development. Khairani and Nurweni (2019) found that Indonesian high school students who participated in anxiety-reduction workshops not only reported greater confidence but also showed measurable improvements in speaking fluency within one semester. Similarly, a study by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) confirmed that anxiety reduction directly enhances language production, suggesting that linguistic progress and psychological well-being must be pursued in tandem.

The integration of technology further offers tools to navigate this interplay. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications such as Duolingo, HelloTalk, or locally developed platforms provide students with opportunities to practice vocabulary and grammar outside the classroom. These platforms often include features such as anonymous interaction or game-based learning, which lower psychological barriers by reducing the fear of public judgment. Warschauer (2004) argues that such digital affordances democratize language practice by offering safe spaces where learners can experiment with language without the pressure of face-to-face evaluation. In Indonesia, Wahyuni (2013) documented that students who used mobile applications for vocabulary reinforcement reported higher confidence during oral classroom tasks.

Nevertheless, technological interventions must be critically assessed, as they cannot fully replicate the pressures of real-time human communication. While online platforms may temporarily alleviate anxiety, they should be integrated with classroom activities that gradually expose learners to authentic interaction. A balanced approach ensures that linguistic competence gained through digital practice translates into psychological readiness for face-to-face speaking contexts.

The interdependence between linguistic competence and psychological readiness is crucial in shaping EFL learners' oral performance. Evidence from Indonesian R&D work on grammar material development shows that grammar remains the most difficult linguistic domain, yet need-based instructional design increases interest, confidence, and participation among learners (Sari, 2019). This suggests that when materials explicitly address learners' challenges, they also enhance motivation—a psychological driver that sustains linguistic growth.

At the same time, the Gen Z profile presents distinct psychological dynamics. Students today are digitally fluent but also experience higher levels of stress and performance anxiety. When teachers apply mindfulness, inclusivity, and supportive communication, students' willingness to engage improves markedly (Sari, 2024a). Such psychologically safe classrooms help learners overcome fear of making mistakes, a key inhibitor of spontaneous speech. Thus, linguistic scaffolding and emotional well-being must be cultivated together; vocabulary and grammar mastery can only flourish in an atmosphere of confidence and belonging.

In sum, the linguistic and psychological dimensions of speaking difficulties are deeply interwoven, creating a cyclical challenge for Indonesian EFL learners. Limited vocabulary and grammatical control lead to hesitation and errors, which in turn fuel anxiety and discourage further speaking practice. Conversely, psychological barriers such as anxiety and fear of negative evaluation prevent learners from engaging in the very communicative activities that would enhance their linguistic resources. Addressing this complex interplay requires pedagogical interventions that integrate linguistic reinforcement with psychological support. By simultaneously expanding learners' lexical and grammatical competence, reducing anxiety through supportive teaching practices, and leveraging technology in culturally sensitive ways, educators can break the cycle and empower Indonesian EFL learners to communicate with greater confidence and fluency.

Pedagogical Practices vs. Communicative Needs

The tension between traditional pedagogical practices and learners' communicative needs constitutes a persistent challenge in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Although the national curriculum has explicitly endorsed Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for over two decades, its implementation remains inconsistent and, in many cases, superficial. CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, learner autonomy, and the use of language as a tool for authentic communication (Littlewood, 2004). However, many classrooms in Indonesia continue to be dominated by grammar-based, teacher-centered methods that privilege accuracy over fluency (Nurkamto, 2003). This misalignment between pedagogical practices and communicative needs directly impedes the development of students' speaking proficiency.

Traditional methods, particularly the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), remain influential across Indonesian secondary and tertiary institutions. GTM prioritizes the explicit teaching of grammatical rules, translation exercises, and written drills. While such practices may improve students' declarative knowledge of grammar, they do not

necessarily translate into spontaneous communicative ability (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In many Indonesian classrooms, students can perform well on grammar tests yet struggle to produce coherent spoken discourse. This outcome reflects the fundamental weakness of methods that treat language as an abstract system rather than a medium for communication.

The persistence of these methods can be attributed to several structural and cultural factors. First, national examinations often prioritize reading and grammar skills, leading teachers to focus instruction on areas that are most likely to yield measurable test results. Astika (2014) observes that high-stakes testing shapes teaching practices in Indonesia, with speaking skills often marginalized due to their absence from standardized assessments. Second, large class sizes—sometimes exceeding 40 students—make it logistically difficult for teachers to implement interactive speaking activities. Under such conditions, lecturing and choral repetition are more manageable than pair or group discussions. Third, many teachers lack adequate training in CLT principles. As Lie (2007) points out, professional development programs in Indonesia often emphasize curriculum compliance rather than equipping teachers with practical communicative techniques.

The consequences of this pedagogical–communicative mismatch are profound. Without authentic opportunities to practice speaking, learners fail to develop the fluency, strategic competence, and interactional skills necessary for real-world communication. Harmer (2007) argues that fluency can only emerge when learners are given extended turns to speak, negotiate meaning, and repair misunderstandings. In Indonesian classrooms where speaking tasks are limited to scripted dialogues or short individual presentations, students seldom experience the dynamic, unpredictable nature of real conversation. This restricted practice environment contributes to learners' reluctance to speak, as they lack both the linguistic readiness and the experiential confidence to engage in authentic exchanges.

Comparative studies illustrate the gap between policy and practice. For instance, a survey by Hamied (2012) found that while most Indonesian teachers were aware of CLT principles, less than half reported regularly using communicative activities in their classes. Similarly, Sulistiyo (2016) documented that many teachers equated CLT with simply encouraging students to talk more, without integrating the structured tasks and scaffolding that make communicative practice effective. These findings suggest that the challenge is not merely one of awareness but of practical implementation and institutional support.

To bridge this gap, it is crucial to align pedagogical practices with learners' communicative needs. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), an offshoot of CLT, offers a promising approach. TBLT organizes instruction around communicative tasks—such as problem-solving, information-gap activities, or role-plays—that require learners to use language meaningfully to achieve a goal (Ellis, 2003). By focusing on outcomes rather than form, TBLT creates conditions for learners to develop fluency while still providing opportunities for attention to accuracy during post-task reflection. In Indonesian contexts, studies by Sari (2018) and Putri (2020) have shown that TBLT increases student participation and reduces speaking anxiety, as learners are more motivated to complete engaging, goal-oriented tasks.

Another effective strategy is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which subjects such as science or history are taught in English. CLIL exposes learners to authentic communicative demands and situates language learning within meaningful contexts (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Although still rare in Indonesia, pilot CLIL

programs in urban schools have demonstrated positive outcomes in students' speaking skills and motivation (Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). Expanding such models could help reconcile the tension between academic content requirements and communicative practice.

Equally important is the role of teacher training and professional development. Teachers need not only theoretical knowledge of CLT but also practical tools to implement it effectively in resource-constrained classrooms. Workshops that model communicative activities, provide ready-to-use materials, and emphasize classroom management techniques for large groups can gradually empower teachers to shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered practices. Research by Wedell and Malderez (2013) highlights that sustainable pedagogical change requires ongoing support rather than one-off training sessions. In the Indonesian context, peer mentoring and school-based professional learning communities could serve as cost-effective mechanisms for fostering continuous growth.

The integration of technology further expands the potential for communicative practice. Digital platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom allow students to engage in real-time discussions, debates, or collaborative projects beyond the physical classroom. These tools are particularly valuable in contexts where class sizes limit opportunities for individual speaking practice. For example, Setyowati and Widiati (2019) found that Indonesian students who participated in online discussion forums demonstrated greater fluency and willingness to communicate compared to peers who only practiced speaking in traditional classroom settings. Thus, when appropriately integrated, technology can mitigate some of the structural barriers that hinder CLT implementation.

Ultimately, aligning pedagogical practices with communicative needs requires systemic reform. Curriculum designers, policymakers, and school administrators must recognize that communicative competence is as important as grammatical accuracy for preparing students to participate in global academic and professional communities. This recognition should be reflected in assessment practices, teacher training, resource allocation, and classroom pedagogy. Without such alignment, Indonesian learners will continue to face the paradox of studying English for years without gaining the confidence or competence to use it effectively in real-world situations.

Findings from classroom-based strategy research further highlight how learner-centered and collaborative activities bridge the gap between pedagogical structure and communicative need. The "Give One, Get One" strategy, for instance, increased comprehension and interaction by encouraging students to exchange ideas, thereby stimulating active language use rather than passive reception (Novalina & Sari, 2025). Likewise, learner-tailored grammar materials developed through R&D encouraged self-directed practice (Sari, 2019).

Within Gen Z-friendly pedagogy, such approaches resonate with the demand for autonomy, personalization, and multimodal interaction. Classrooms that blend task-based collaboration, peer exchange, and reflective feedback better nurture both accuracy and fluency (Sari, 2024a). These studies converge on the principle that communicative competence emerges not from isolated grammar drills but from structured, interactive experiences where language serves meaningful goals. In conclusion, the gap between pedagogical practices and learners' communicative needs represents one of the most significant barriers to developing speaking proficiency in Indonesian EFL contexts. While national policies advocate for CLT, classroom realities are often constrained by

examinations, class sizes, and limited teacher training. To resolve this tension, it is essential to adopt communicative approaches such as TBLT and CLIL, provide sustained professional development for teachers, integrate technology to expand speaking opportunities, and reform assessment systems to value oral competence. Only by addressing these pedagogical challenges in relation to communicative needs can Indonesian EFL education fulfill its goal of equipping students to use English fluently and confidently.

Technology and Equity Gaps

The rapid development of digital technology has reshaped global approaches to language education, offering unprecedented opportunities for EFL learners. In Indonesia, **Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)** applications, video-conferencing tools, and interactive digital platforms provide pathways for learners to access authentic language input and engage in speaking practice beyond the classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2018). By enabling exposure to native and non-native speakers worldwide, technology can supplement the often-limited communicative opportunities available in formal education.

Yet the transformative potential of technology is unevenly realized due to **equity gaps**. Access to devices, stable internet, and digital literacy is distributed unequally across Indonesia's diverse geography. Learners in urban schools with strong technological infrastructure often benefit from blended learning models that integrate digital tools for speaking practice. In contrast, those in rural or under-resourced areas may lack basic connectivity, leaving them excluded from these innovations (UNESCO, 2021). This **digital divide** risks deepening educational inequality, as students with better access to technology gain an additional advantage in oral proficiency.

Beyond access, teacher preparedness represents another critical barrier. Wahyuni (2013) observed that while many Indonesian teachers had access to computers and projectors, they lacked the training to integrate these tools into communicative activities. Instead of leveraging platforms for dialogue, teachers often used technology as a substitute for traditional materials, focusing on grammar slides or digital worksheets. In such cases, technology reinforces outdated pedagogical practices rather than transforming them.

Nonetheless, promising examples of technology integration exist. In urban schools, platforms such as **Zoom, WhatsApp voice notes, and language-learning apps** have been used to encourage students to practice English in low-stakes, asynchronous environments. Studies have shown that these tools can reduce anxiety, as learners feel less pressure compared to face-to-face interactions (Warschauer, 2004). For instance, Indonesian students using HelloTalk and Tandem reported greater confidence when communicating with peers worldwide, as anonymity and game-like features lowered their fear of making mistakes (AbdulAziz & Elmahdi, 2024).

Yet technology cannot be viewed as a panacea. While digital platforms provide valuable scaffolding, they cannot fully replicate the complexities of real-time, face-to-face interaction. Overreliance on technology risks producing learners who perform well in online contexts but struggle in spontaneous spoken encounters. Therefore, technology must be integrated as a **complementary tool** rather than a replacement for classroom interaction. Blended learning models, where in-person communicative tasks follow digital practice, offer one way to ensure that technological gains translate into real-world proficiency.

To close the technology gap, **policy interventions** are essential. Government initiatives must prioritize infrastructure development in underserved regions and provide targeted professional development programs to equip teachers with digital pedagogical skills. Equally important is fostering a culture of innovation where teachers feel empowered to experiment with new tools without fear of failure. Only through systemic investment in both access and training can technology fulfill its promise of democratizing English learning in Indonesia.

Technology plays a pivotal role in uniting linguistic and psychological dimensions of learning. Digital and AI-assisted tools—when thoughtfully integrated—enhance engagement, immediacy of feedback, and learner autonomy. Wordtune, for example, provides real-time suggestions that promote linguistic reflection and stylistic experimentation, allowing students to revise with greater confidence (Sari, 2024b). Similarly, AI-driven classroom models demonstrate that balanced human–AI collaboration fosters sustained motivation and deeper learning rather than dependency on automation (Sari et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the benefits of technology are unevenly distributed. Connectivity disparities and teacher digital literacy gaps can exacerbate inequality, limiting access to interactive and confidence-building experiences. Consistent with Gen Z engagement research, technological integration must therefore be equitable, ethical, and complementary—bridging, not replacing, human interaction (Sari, 2024a; Sari, 2024b). Professional training and infrastructure development remain critical for ensuring that technological affordances translate into genuine communicative competence.

In conclusion, technology holds enormous potential to mitigate speaking difficulties in Indonesian EFL classrooms, but its impact depends on equitable access and practical integration. Without addressing the structural inequities that shape digital learning, technological advances may reinforce rather than reduce disparities. A balanced approach that combines infrastructure investment, teacher training, and blended pedagogy can ensure that technology becomes a bridge rather than a barrier to communicative competence.

Cultural Conditioning and Learner Silence

EFL learning in Indonesia cannot be fully understood without considering the profound role of cultural values in shaping classroom dynamics. In Indonesian society, cultural norms such as humility, respect for authority, and group harmony significantly influence learners' willingness to speak. As Cortazzi and Jin (1996) argue, Asian learners often interpret frequent speaking not as active engagement but as potentially arrogant or disrespectful. Within this cultural framework, silence is not necessarily a sign of disengagement but can serve as a strategy to maintain social harmony and avoid embarrassment.

This cultural conditioning intersects with linguistic and psychological barriers, intensifying learners' reluctance to speak. Kirkpatrick (2010) notes that students often fear being judged not only for linguistic errors but also for violating cultural expectations of modesty. As a result, even those with sufficient vocabulary and grammar may refrain from participation, creating classrooms where silence prevails despite years of English instruction. This phenomenon challenges Western pedagogical assumptions that equate active verbal participation with practical learning.

The consequences of this cultural silence are significant. Limited participation reduces practice opportunities, thereby hindering the development of fluency and

communicative competence. Moreover, students who remain silent miss out on corrective feedback and peer interaction, two essential components of language acquisition (Swain, 1985). Over time, silence becomes self-reinforcing: the less students speak, the less confident they feel, and the less capable they become of handling communicative tasks. Addressing learner silence requires a **culturally sensitive pedagogy** that balances respect for local values with the demands of communicative language learning. For example, teachers can encourage participation through **pair work, small group discussions, and anonymous response systems**, which reduce the perceived risks of speaking in front of the entire class. Tutyandari (2005) found that Indonesian students were more willing to talk when given supportive and non-threatening opportunities for oral expression. Similarly, teachers who adopted **indirect corrective feedback**—such as recasting errors rather than overtly pointing them out—helped reduce fear of embarrassment while still promoting accuracy.

Cultural sensitivity also involves **reframing the role of speaking** within the classroom. By positioning oral participation as an act of collaborative learning rather than self-promotion, teachers can align speaking practice with cultural values of community and harmony. Explicit discussions about the importance of speaking for academic and professional success can further motivate students to balance modesty with the need to express themselves.

The integration of technology also offers culturally appropriate pathways to reduce silence. Online discussion boards, voice messaging, and anonymous interaction platforms allow students to practice speaking in ways that feel less socially risky. Warschauer (2004) found that learners in Asian contexts often expressed themselves more freely in digital environments than in traditional classrooms. In Indonesia, similar patterns suggest that carefully blended digital and face-to-face strategies can create more inclusive communicative opportunities.

Indonesian classrooms are also shaped by sociocultural values emphasizing modesty and respect for authority, which can intensify learner silence. To address this, inclusive classroom cultures must value cooperation over competition and empathy over evaluation. Evidence from Gen Z-focused pedagogical studies confirms that culturally responsive strategies—such as small-group collaboration, peer mentoring, and tolerance for mistakes—foster participation without undermining cultural norms (Sari, 2024a). Digital tools offering low-stakes interaction (e.g., audio messages, anonymous contributions) further help students rehearse speech privately before public performance, turning silence into incremental engagement.

Ultimately, recognizing silence as a culturally informed behavior allows educators to design participation pathways that align with local values while promoting communicative growth. This synthesis of linguistic scaffolding, psychological safety, technological mediation, and cultural empathy reflects a holistic model for modern EFL instruction in Indonesia.

Ultimately, cultural conditioning should not be viewed as an insurmountable obstacle but as a **contextual factor** that must be acknowledged in pedagogy. By designing teaching strategies that respect cultural norms while gradually expanding communicative opportunities, educators can transform silence into participation. This requires patience, cultural empathy, and pedagogical innovation. When teachers validate students' cultural backgrounds while providing structured pathways for oral practice, learners are more likely to overcome silence and develop the confidence to use English actively.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that speaking difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners arise from a complex interplay of linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, technological, and sociocultural factors. These challenges cannot be attributed merely to students' individual shortcomings but must be viewed as systemic issues that reflect the realities of the national education context. The evidence suggests that limited mastery of vocabulary and grammar continues to undermine learners' ability to produce speech fluently and accurately. Linguistic weaknesses not only hinder communication but also increase hesitation and self-consciousness, which in turn fuel psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear of mistakes, and lack of confidence. This psychological dimension is particularly significant in oral communication, where immediacy and real-time interaction demand both competence and composure. Without sufficient vocabulary or grammatical control, students tend to withdraw from speaking activities, which perpetuates a cycle of silence and low participation.

Pedagogical practices further compound these challenges. Although the curriculum has embraced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), its implementation remains inconsistent across schools. Many classrooms continue to rely on traditional, teacher-centered instruction that emphasizes accuracy over fluency. Students are often asked to memorize dialogues or perform mechanical drills, but they are rarely given opportunities for authentic communicative practice. This mismatch between pedagogical practices and communicative needs results in students who can recite rules but cannot engage in spontaneous conversation. Moreover, teachers themselves often struggle with limited professional development opportunities, insufficient exposure to innovative methodologies, and inadequate resources to implement communicative activities effectively. Without systemic support, teachers are unable to transform their classrooms into environments that truly foster speaking skills.

The technological dimension introduces both opportunities and inequities. On the one hand, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), online platforms, and digital tools can provide learners with exposure to authentic input, interactive speaking practice, and flexible learning environments. On the other hand, unequal access to technology exacerbates existing educational disparities. Students in urban schools may benefit from reliable internet access, robust digital infrastructure, and teacher training in technology integration, while those in rural or under-resourced areas remain excluded. This digital divide not only limits practice opportunities but also reinforces inequity in outcomes. Without deliberate efforts to ensure equitable access and adequate teacher training, the promise of technology will remain unfulfilled for many Indonesian learners.

Cultural conditioning also plays a decisive role. Indonesian learners are often socialized in environments that emphasize humility, group harmony, and respect for authority. These values, while positive in many respects, can discourage verbal participation in classroom settings where speaking up may be perceived as showing off or disrespecting peers. In contrast, Western-oriented models of communicative learning encourage assertiveness and frequent verbal interaction. This cultural mismatch creates a dilemma for learners, who must negotiate between the expectations of their local culture and the demands of global communication. Teachers face the challenge of creating spaces that encourage participation without compromising cultural sensitivity. This requires approaches that respect local values while gradually fostering confidence and willingness to communicate.

Taken together, these interrelated factors create a systemic web of constraints that inhibits Indonesian EFL learners from developing fluent speaking skills. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, multifaceted response. Pedagogically, classrooms must transition toward more communicative, student-centered practices that provide authentic opportunities for speaking and prioritize fluency alongside accuracy. Psychologically, teachers must cultivate supportive environments in which errors are reframed as natural steps in learning rather than failures. Technologically, policymakers and institutions must commit to equitable digital access and provide sustained teacher training so that tools are not only available but also effectively used. Culturally, approaches must be context-sensitive, balancing global communicative norms with local traditions of modesty and harmony.

The contribution of this study lies in synthesizing these diverse perspectives into one integrated framework. Rather than examining each challenge in isolation, the analysis highlights how linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, technological, and cultural dimensions reinforce one another. This systemic view allows for the development of strategies that are both comprehensive and contextually relevant. For example, improving vocabulary instruction alone will not suffice if students remain anxious about making mistakes; likewise, introducing digital tools will not be effective if teachers lack training or if cultural norms continue to silence learners. Solutions must be interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Future research should build upon this synthesis by conducting intervention-based studies that implement integrated strategies and measure their effectiveness in real classrooms. Comparative studies between urban and rural contexts would be especially valuable, as they could shed light on how disparities in resources shape outcomes. Longitudinal research could also track how sustained exposure to communicative methods, technological innovations, and culturally sensitive practices influences learners' development over time. Such studies would not only refine pedagogical strategies but also inform national policymaking, ensuring that reforms address the needs of diverse learners across Indonesia.

In conclusion, the findings emphasize that overcoming speaking difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners requires more than isolated reforms. It calls for systemic transformation involving curriculum designers, teachers, policymakers, and communities. Only through collaborative, context-aware, and inclusive efforts can learners be empowered to develop the confidence and competence necessary for effective communication in English. By addressing both structural barriers and individual learner needs, Indonesian education can move toward fulfilling its vision of producing globally competitive yet culturally grounded English speakers.

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