# Exploring Strategies of Teaching Speaking among Indonesian and Malaysian Secondary English Teachers

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### Abstract

The current study aims to explore strategies of teaching speaking among EFL/ESL teachers in Indonesian and Malaysian secondary schools. The data were obtained from 55 Indonesian teachers and 9 teachers from Malaysia, who were asked to fill out an openended questionnaire consisting of 11 items. The questions ranged from teaching strategies to challenges in teaching speaking and the use of IT in the classroom setting. The findings of the descriptive analysis showed that teachers in both countries used relatively similar strategies, except for the aspect regarding the proportion of English use in the classroom. In this case, Malaysian teachers used English most of the time in their speaking class, compared to their Indonesian counterparts who admitted using L1 in various proportions and/or situations. It can be safely assumed that the status of English in Indonesia and Malaysia (EFL vs. ESL) is responsible for this difference, with Malaysian teachers and students being more comfortable with the use of English in their daily encounters.

**Keywords**: EFL Indonesian vs ESL Malaysian secondary teachers, strategies, teaching speaking

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of users of English from non-English speaking countries has resulted in the changing roles of English as an additional language (Galloway, 2017), as an international language (Renandya & Widodo, 2016), and as a global language and a lingua franca (Fang, 2017). Furthermore, the number of English users and learners from non-English speaking countries also indeed exceeds that of those from English-speaking countries (Galloway, 2017). Such a status of English should also be understood to have several implications in the economic contexts, especially in today's 21st-century work environment. With the establishment of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community, for instance, English has been used as the medium of operation to minimize the unnecessary barriers encountered by countries under the ASEAN Plus Three Forum comprising ten members of ASEAN and Japan, China, and South Korea (Widiati & Havati, 2015). Those implications of English, which have reached beyond governmental, educational, and economic endeavors regionally as well as globally, apparently have positioned English as a language that must be mastered by individuals in order to keep up with the rapid development of the era.

In educational contexts, English has gained popularity in foreign language education since it has been required as a school subject in formal educational curricula from primary to tertiary education both in English as a foreign language (EFL) context and English as a second language (ESL) context. Due to such circumstances, English practitioners and teachers should find out the best strategies to help learners master English skills comprising listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, regardless of the demands, a number of studies have reported that many EFL and ESL students still have to put more effort into speaking English (Muslimin et al., 2022), and teachers therefore appear to face challenges in teaching speaking in language classroom practices. Out of many constraints in the arena of EFL and ESL settings, teaching speaking was considered the most challenging skill confronted by teachers (Yusuf & Zuraini, 2016). Apart from the teacher's point of view, ESL and EFL learners also agreed that speaking has become the most difficult skill to master compared to other skills (Anugrah, 2021; Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Paneerselvam & Mohamad 2019).

Speaking is a complex and challenging skill (Khabbazbashi, 2017) and is thus found to be one of the most feared context-based anxieties globally (Marzuki et al.,

2020). When language learners intend to speak, they are required to compose grammar fluency, comprehension, and accuracy at once (Asdar, 2017). Hence, it is not surprising that most EFL learners find it hard to speak English since they might be afraid of making mistakes in producing utterances and mispronouncing words, as also studied by Marzuki (2017). Similarly, according to Farhani et al. (2020) and Poedjiastutie (2020), many freshmen of English language study programs struggle to develop their speaking skills. Besides the EFL contexts, Ahmed (2018) also found that teachers face a great deal of difficulty in initiating speaking among Malaysian ESL learners, who often have a sense of fear, confusion, and misconception to speak during classroom practices. The difficulties that hinder learners in achieving fluency in speaking, referring to Ali et al (2020), are also encountered by ESL learners due to psychological, linguistic, and social problems. The challenges in speaking faced by EFL and ESL learners during classroom practices might also become burdensome for teachers in solving their learners' problems. It is reasonable then if teachers possibly encounter a number of obstacles that impede the progress of the pedagogy of speaking classes in EFL and ESL classroom practices.

A body of research has revealed challenges in teaching speaking faced by EFL teachers. A study conducted by Yusuf and Zuraeni (2016), for instance, interviewed some Indonesian EFL teachers. The result unraveled the challenges they encountered the most during teaching speaking in EFL classrooms, namely, students' lack of vocabulary, pronunciation problems, nothing to say, lack of motivation, and the use or interferences of the mother tongue. Another study by Anugrah (2021) also investigated the perceived barriers to teaching speaking by EFL teachers in Indonesia. The result showed that lack of interaction becomes the most challenging task for teachers. This is depicted by the students' low motivation to speak and reluctance to produce utterances. Other challenges perceived by Ethiopian EFL teachers are also related to the classroom atmosphere in the speaking class as has been studied by Desta (2019). He found that the major challenges were the inconvenient classroom atmospheres and inadequate motivation for pair and group work when they were assigned to have group discussions.

Another strand of research has also demonstrated results concerning how ESL teachers encountered problems in teaching speaking. A study conducted by

Ahmed (2018) revealed that language practitioners and teachers in ESL contexts often fail to materialize the actual purpose of speaking. Such a condition is triggered by their major concern for the learners' accuracy rather than fluency, more on the learners' grammatical correctness and structure-based sentences than on natural communication, and more on teacher-oriented classrooms than on student-oriented ones. Besides, it is also reported that the majority of ESL teachers under Ahmed's (2018) study have the following encountered barriers: deficiency in mutual interaction and communication, the dominance of the teacher during ESL classroom practices, the inefficiency of integrating technology in classrooms, and the absence of speaking techniques among ESL teachers. In a similar context, a study by Paneerselvam and Mohamad (2019) also investigated the challenges of Malaysian ESL teachers in teaching speaking. They revealed that teachers have difficulties encouraging learners' motivation and self-confidence, decreasing learners' anxiety, and developing learners' vocabulary.

The aforementioned studies have reported how teaching speaking had become one of the constraints perceived by EFL and ESL teachers in language teaching. In step with that, various strategies for teaching English also have been studied to help teachers in facilitating their learners to master speaking skills. Krebt (2017) has investigated the effectiveness of using role-play techniques in EFL classrooms. It confirmed that role play provides a kind of interesting environment for Iranian EFL learners to flourish in that leads to better attention in learning and stimulates them to actively participate in speaking classes. Paneerselvam and Mohamad (2019) identified some approaches that can be utilized by ESL teachers to solve learners' problems in speaking, namely using social media, flipped classrooms, debates, and employing interactive games as learning activities within and outside the classroom. Other research studies also offered effective strategies for teaching speaking, such as using social media (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019) and exposing learners to authentic language input through the integration of technology (Bahrani, 2011).

A number of researchers have extensively studied to outline effective strategies to help learners have good proficiency in speaking both in EFL and ESL contexts (e.g., Ahmed, 2018; Anugrah, 2021; Desta, 2019; Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019; Yusuf & Zuraeni, 2016). However, a study which attempts to compare the strategies in teaching speaking carried out by teachers from EFL and ESL contexts has not been studied much. Following the foregoing background and attempts, this present study is thus carried out to find answers to this research question: What strategies are used by Indonesian and Malaysian secondary English teachers in teaching speaking skills? The results of this study are expected to portray the similarities and differences in teaching strategies carried out by Indonesian and Malaysian English secondary teachers as well as their challenges during teaching speaking in EFL and ESL contexts.

#### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The study involved 55 English teachers from Indonesia and their 9 Malaysian counterparts. The teachers were not selected based on certain sampling methods, rather they voluntarily participated by responding to the link posted in a number of teacher social media forums. The number of the participants participating in this study reflected the number of responses to the questionnaire that we received after waiting for two weeks.

In order to obtain data from the participants of the study, an open-ended questionnaire consisting of 11 items was developed. The questionnaire inquired the participants about (1) the activities they do before teaching speaking, (2) the frequency of using English when teaching speaking in the class, (3) the strategies they usually use in teaching speaking (4) the teaching strategy they use the most, (5) the reasons for using the strategy the most, (6) the way they implement the strategy in teaching speaking, (7) some improvement in students' speaking skills using such a strategy, (8) the effectiveness of the strategy in teaching speaking, (9) the challenges they face in teaching speaking, (10) technology integration in teaching speaking, and (11) the technology applications they use in teaching speaking. The questionnaire was moderated by two university teachers specializing in teaching speaking courses for construct validity and then tried out to ten students selected randomly.

The responses from the questionnaire were coded and classified in order to find the patterns of strategies in teaching speaking from teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia, which results in the comparison of strategies used in both countries.

#### **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

The results showed that in general, Indonesian and Malaysian secondary English teachers gave relatively similar responses toward all the questions, except for the question which focuses on the frequency of using English during teaching speaking in the classrooms.

In responding to the question about the activities before teaching speaking, teachers in both countries revealed that the strategies involved were mostly related to warm-up activities, such as giving some leading questions or Q&A about the material, playing audio or video related to the materials, showing pictures, and introducing new vocabulary and expressions. The warm-up activities, as Savaş (2016) and Estalkhbijari and Khodareza (2012) suggest, are effective in starting up speaking classes.

The activities teachers usually engage in before teaching speaking can be classified into three categories: serious activity (e.g., introducing some expressions related to the topic, reviewing previous lessons, brainstorming), fun stimulus (e.g., doing ice-breaking activities, telling stories, playing games), and familiar things (e.g., checking students' wellbeing, asking general questions, finding information about students' background knowledge regarding the topic). Even though all three categories are typically present prior to the teaching and learning process, Indonesian teachers tend to employ more "serious" approaches compared to their Malaysian counterparts, who are relatively more relaxed in this phase. This might be the result of a relatively rigid pattern of lesson plans implemented in Indonesian schools, which generally dictate teachers to apply certain types of sequences in preteaching activities. As Cirocki and Anam (2021) point out, Indonesian teachers are expected to develop detailed lesson plans which are often defined and inspected by external bodies, a process that might limit teachers' creativity in applying fun activities.

Among all the questions in the study, question number two is probably the most interesting, since it draws quite different responses from the two groups of teachers. Asked about how frequently English is used when teaching speaking in class, Indonesian teachers gave a relatively wide range of percentages, from 35% to almost 100%, while the figure for Malaysian teachers is between 75% to 100%.

Table 1. The use of English in Indonesian Classes

The use of English in classroom	No of respondent
Almost 100%	6

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70-80%	10
70%	4
60%	2
50%	14
35-50%	16
30%	3

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The findings of this study imply that from the point of view of some Indonesian teachers, the use of local language is necessary because some students may have problems comprehending the materials or instructions given by teachers when they use English. This situation is not surprising since, referring to Fachrunnisa and Nuraeni (2022), the use of English does not become habitual on daily basi s and social interactions of Indonesian EFL learners. A study conducted by Kaharuddin and Naning (2014) revealed five categories of listening comprehension problems also may become another factor in the Indonesian EFL learners' problems in comprehending the teachers' spoken English, such as problems due to teachers' speaking speed, unfamiliar talk, exaggerated pronunciation, the use of colloquial language and reduced forms, the students' limited vocabulary, inconsistency of listening learning habit, the failure to concentrate, students' inability to convert messages appropriately when listening.

Different from the results obtained from the respondents of English teachers in Indonesia, the findings showed that Malaysian English secondary teachers admitted that they mostly used English as the language of instruction during the speaking class. The switch to local language usually happened only when students did not understand the context of the teacher's talk .

**Table 2.** The use of English in Malaysian Classes

The use of English in classroom	No of respondent
Almost 100%	6
75-80%	2
30	1

The differences in the use of English in teaching speaking are likely due to the different status of English in both countries, where it is a second language in Malaysia but a foreign one in Indonesia. English in Malaysia has been used for various purposes which lead to the fact that some people use it as a second language. For example, at the academic level, some scholars are quite familiar with

English and occasionally use it as a means of communicating (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006).

The main questions of the study (questions 2 to 5), which asked the teacher respondents about strategies they generally use to teach speaking, resulted in relatively similar responses, with role-play, storytelling and group discussion topping the list as the most popular strategies for both Indonesian and Malaysian teachers. These strategies are in fact popular and widely used by teachers around the world. Ahmada and Munawaroh (2022) and Rochman (2014), for instance, suggested that roleplay is effective to increase students' motivation to participate in speaking classes. Besides, referring to Zuhriyah (2017) and Zaid and Sarjiyati (2019), storytelling is also proven to be effective in improving students' comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Furthermore, a study conducted by Megawati (2018) asserts that storytelling enhances students' enthusiasm and confidence to speak in class.

In addition to role play and storytelling, group discussions also became the most mentioned strategies carried out by Indonesian and Malaysian English secondary teachers in teaching speaking. There were a number of research studies concerning the effectiveness of group discussions to improve students' speaking skills (e.g., Bohari, 2019; Manafe, 2020; Susanti et al., 2021). Manafe (2020) further suggests that the use of group discussions allows the speaking class to be active and alive since the students are motivated to develop and share ideas more freely.

An interesting outcome of the study comes from the result of questionnaire item 7, in which the respondents were asked about whether there were improvements in students' speaking skill after the implementation of the strategies. Indonesian teachers tended to be less optimistic in this regard, with 11 out of 55 believing that the improvements "did not always" happen. One teacher even mentioned that the strategies did not seem to work. On the other hand, the responses from the Malaysian side were more positive, with all being convinced that the students showed improvement in their speaking skills. One teacher responded "yes with condition", which he or she further clarified that if the students are able to talk using other words than they have written, it shows that they are developing towards another level of speaking. The result of questionnaire item 7 corresponds with item number 8, where 7 teachers from Indonesia mentioned that the strategies were not really effective. Their Malaysian counterparts, on the other hand, were confident that the strategies were "highly effective", as admitted by six teachers and "good enough" as stated by three teachers.

With regards to the challenges in teaching speaking, our study showed that there was no significant difference in challenges perceived by Indonesian and Malaysian English secondary teachers. The most mentioned challenges were related to students' lack of confidence and limited vocabulary. These denote that despite the different contexts, EFL and ESL teachers face the same problems when they teach speaking skills. Previous studies, such as Ahmed (2018), Anugrah (2021), Desta (2019), and Marzuki (2017) have also confirmed that the major challenges in teaching speaking were the learners' lack of confidence to speak, which is related to their low motivation. Yusuf and Zuraeni (2016) also asserted that EFL learners' limited vocabulary has become the most challenging condition to encourage them to speak English. This was also supported by Widiati and Cahyono (2006), who suggest that the ability to speak English is a very complex task, and that considering the nature of what is involved in speaking, not all of the students in an EFL speaking class dare to speak. They further suggested that it is also apparent that, naturally, to speak is not only to convey a message that someone needs or to get information that has not been known but, more importantly, to interact with people.

The last point of the questionnaire is related to the use of certain applications in teaching speaking, and the result showed that all participating Indonesian and Malaysian teachers integrate technology applications in teaching speaking. With the fast development of technology, there has been an extensive search for how it is integrated into language teaching. A number of studies have pointed out that the use of technology in the language classroom allows teachers to provide interactive and meaningful activities which can engage students to actively participate in the class (Tanjung, 2020). Besides, Anggeraini (2018) also confirmed that the integration of technology plays an important role in promoting interactive learning and teaching activities as well as enhancing learners' initiatives to learn and be more creative learners. Furthermore, technology nowadays is an inseparable thing in students' lives as it provides them with access to countless online resources and materials. These useful merits of technology may encourage students to be more independent since they can search for any information available on the internet

related to the course without being too much dependent on the teacher during classroom practices.

## CONCLUSION

The current study has revealed that English teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia use relatively similar strategies in teaching speaking, except for the aspect regarding the proportion of English use in the classroom. It is evident that Malaysian teachers use English almost all the time in their speaking classes, compared to their Indonesian counterparts who admitted using *Bahasa Indonesia* in various proportions and/or situations. This situation is mostly due to the consequence of the status of English in Indonesia and Malaysia, that is, as EFL and ESL respectively, with Malaysian teachers and students being more comfortable with the use of English in their daily encounters.

Based on the research findings, the implications that this study has on ELT, particularly in teaching speaking, can be of three orientations. First, there is a need intended to improve both EFL and ESL teachers' to provide sufficient support skills to intensively learn how to prepare and design speaking classes in EFL as well as ESL classroom practices. Accordingly, efforts need to be continuously made concerning quality improvements in English instruction in Indonesia. More particularly, a curriculum of English education that can be effective in producing graduates who are able to communicate at the international level is needed. Second, teachers, in both EFL and ESL contexts, have an important role in fostering learners' ability to speak English well. For this, English teachers need to help maintain good relations with EFL and ESL learners, encourage them to use English more often, and create classroom activities in order to enhance more student interactions. Third, regarding the importance of integrating technology in a language classroom, as suggested by Tanjung (2020), teachers are highly demanded to put great concern into selecting, preparing, integrating, assessing, and evaluating types of technology being employed in classroom instruction.

This study, however, also has some limitations, which were mainly caused by the fact that there were a limited number of responses from Malaysian teachers. While the responses from individual teachers remain valid, the limited respondents might result in some possible biases when comparisons between the results from both Indonesian and Malaysian teachers are applied. The study has also relied on self-report in the questionnaire with no empirical data from the actual teaching and learning process. Further studies involving interviews and observation might help paint a better picture of the strategies used by English teachers in their speaking class. Considering the current study's limitations, which involved only a small number of teachers and did not qualitatively explore English teachers' responses, further research is suggested to address such issues.

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