Exploring Teachers' Instructional Strategies to Facilitate the Oral Fluency of EFL Beginner Level Students

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is a crucial skill in everyday life, encompassing various sub-skills such as oral fluency. However, teaching speaking effectively is a challenging endeavor, as developing good oral fluency requires time and effort. To enhance students' oral fluency, English teachers employ various instructional strategies. To investigate these strategies, the researcher conducted a descriptive study utilizing interviews and observations. The study focused on two English teachers instructing speaking classes at an Islamic private school in Sidoarjo, which offers an International Class program called M-ICO (Muhammadiyah International Class Orientation). The findings revealed that teachers employed student-led activities such as presentations, discussions, and game-based learning to facilitate students' oral fluency; choosing learning materials that can boost students' oral fluency; using questioning frequently. Additionally, the study identified several speaking difficulties faced by students, such as classroom management issues, linguistic challenges, inhibition, and reliance on their mother tongue. To address these issues, teachers employed strategies such as providing challenges or games, encouraging the use of dictionaries for pronunciation learning, normalizing mistakes, and motivating students during the learning process. In conclusion, teachers adapt their instructional strategies and address concerns based on the unique conditions of their classes. These findings have implications for educators to improve students' oral fluency through strategic approaches. Furthermore, future research should explore the relationship between Islamic values or materials and oral fluency in the context of Islamic school environments.

Keywords: *Instructional Strategy; Teaching Oral Fluency; Beginner Level*

ABSTRAK

Berbicara merupakan keterampilan penting dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Keterampilan tersebut memiliki beberapa sub-keterampilan, dan salah satunya adalah kelancaran berbicara. Oleh karena itu, mengajar berbicara bukanlah tugas yang mudah karena memerlukan waktu untuk memiliki kelancaran berbicara yang baik. Mengembangkan kelancaran berbicara siswa merupakan bagian dari tugas guru bahasa Inggris. Dalam meningkatkan kelancaran berbicara siswa, guru perlu memiliki strategi mereka sendiri. Oleh karena itu, peneliti melakukan studi tentang strategi pengajaran guru untuk memfasilitasi kelancaran berbicara siswa mereka. Peneliti menggunakan wawancara dan observasi dalam mengumpulkan data sehingga penelitian ini adalah penelitian deskriptif. Partisipan dari penelitian ini adalah dua guru yang mengajar kelas berbicara bahasa Inggris di salah satu sekolah swasta Islam di Sidoarjo yang memiliki program Kelas Internasional, yaitu M-ICO (Muhammadiyah International Class Orientation). Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki strategi mereka sendiri untuk memfasilitasi kelancaran berbicara siswa mereka dengan membuat kegiatan yang dipimpin oleh siswa seperti presentasi, diskusi, dan pembelajaran berbasis permainan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa

ada beberapa kesulitan berbicara siswa yang dihadapi oleh guru seperti situasi kelas, bahasa, inhibisi, dan penggunaan bahasa ibu. Untuk mengatasi kesulitan berbicara, guru memutuskan untuk memberikan tantangan atau permainan, membiarkan siswa memeriksa kamus untuk belajar pengucapan, memperbolehkan kesalahan dan memotivasi siswa dalam proses pembelajaran. Sebagai kesimpulan, guru memiliki strategi pengajaran dan kepedulian mereka sendiri yang didasarkan pada kondisi kelas. Implikasi dari temuan ini dianggap penting bagi pendidik untuk meningkatkan kelancaran berbicara siswa dengan strategi-strategi yang efektif. Sedangkan untuk penelitian selanjutnya, perlu dilakukan penelitian tentang hubungan antara nilai-nilai Islam atau materi dan kelancaran berbicara dalam lingkungan sekolah Islam.

Kata Kunci: *Strategi Pengajaran; Mengajar Kelancaran Bicara; Level Pemula*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill is crucial in language teaching, but it presents challenges for both learners and teachers (Pakula, 2019). Proficient speakers enjoy various benefits, such as better communication, information acquisition, and career success (Cole et al., 2007). However, speaking is a difficult skill to learn, as Brown (2001) stated in his book it involves linguistic characteristics like clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, colloquial language, and more. Oral fluency, a sub-skill of speaking, plays a significant role in communication and is assessed in speaking tests.

Developing oral fluency requires intensive practice and is influenced by learners' emotions and motivation (Pangket, 2019). Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating oral fluency by employing effective strategies. Previous studies have explored various strategies, including interactive activities (McDonough & Sato, 2019), storytelling (Sharma, 2018), free-talking conversations (Golkatseva et al., 2015), cooperative learning activities (Alrayah, 2018; Namaziandost et al., 2020), and project-based learning (Mulyati, 2022), all of which have shown significant improvements in students' oral fluency.

The terms teaching method, instructional strategy, and instructional technique can be confusing. A teaching method refers to a set of specifications in the classroom that aim to achieve linguistic objectives, involving the roles of teachers and learners and classroom activities (Richards, 2015). Popular teaching methods that enhance oral fluency include the direct method and communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2001; Larsen & Anderson, 2011; Richard, 2015).

On the other hand, an instructional technique refers to underlying thoughts and actions of teaching (Larsen & Anderson, 2011). Techniques in the direct method include reading aloud,

question-answer exercises, self-correction activities, and more. In communicative language teaching, techniques such as information-gap activities, jigsaw activities, and task-completion activities are utilized. These techniques engage students in thought and speech production.

In essence, instructional techniques are specific activities, tasks, or exercises employed by teachers within a particular teaching method. When it comes to teaching speaking skills, various challenges need to be addressed. Speaking is crucial for language learning as it allows students to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). However, it is often neglected in the classroom, with teachers focusing more on grammar and written language (Hosni, 2014; Pakula, 2019). To overcome these difficulties, it is important to incorporate oral skills in L2 teaching.

Learners face several difficulties in speaking. These include linguistic challenges, the influence of the mother tongue, and inhibition (Hosni, 2014; Rezeki, Sujarwo, & Ibrahim, 2022). Factors such as teachers' perceptions and beliefs about teaching speaking, lack of effective teaching strategies, and inadequate speaking tasks in the curriculum contribute to these difficulties (Hosni, 2014). To address these challenges, teachers must understand the factors that affect students' oral fluency, including affective factors like self-restriction and motivation, as well as cognitive-linguistic factors like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Pangket, 2019).

To overcome these difficulties, teachers need to employ appropriate teaching strategies. Moore (2014) defined instructional strategy as a set of tools to be employed mindfully in teaching practice so that learners are encouraged in the learning process. Commonly used strategies include group work activities, role-play, discussions, and problem-solving (Pangket, 2019; Rezeki, Sujarwo, & Ibrahim, 2022). Debate, prepared talks, games, and brainstorming have also been found effective in teaching speaking skills (Rianingsih, 2015). By implementing these strategies, teachers can enhance students' speaking abilities and create engaging learning environments.

Oral fluency in language learning is influenced by various factors. Pangket (2019) identified motivation, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar as key factors affecting learners' oral fluency. Strategies such as cooperative learning, engaging speaking activities, and contextualized learning materials have been found effective in enhancing oral fluency (Alrayah, 2018; Golkaltseva et al., 2015; Rossiter et al., 2010). However, not all strategies yield significant results, as demonstrated by the study of McDonough & Sato in 2019.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, incorporating Islamic values poses a challenge due to cultural differences (Wijayanto, 2020). However, it is important

to integrate Islamic values in English teaching to promote moral character among students (Milal et al., 2020). Islamic schools in Indonesia often prioritize English language learning alongside Islamic education, implementing various English-related activities (Efrizal, 2012; Holandyah et al., 2022; Rahayu, 2015; Utami, 2020). The inclusion of Islamic values in English teaching can have a positive impact on students' fluency, motivation, confidence, and willingness to use English in daily communication (Utami, 2020).

Therefore, incorporating Islamic materials and values in English teaching can enhance students' oral fluency and provide them with opportunities to use English in alignment with Islamic principles. Islamic schools also contribute to enhancing students' speaking skills, with specific cultural practices or programs to boost oral fluency. Efrizal (2012) showed a variety of activities in an Islamic school such as morning activities, language movements, speeches, contests, and various interactive techniques. In addition, Sakina (2020), in her thesis investigating an Islamic school, showed that the teacher employs several strategies in enhancing students' speaking skills such as using recordings and transcripts, noticing-gap-activity, drilling and chants, writing tasks, dialogues, storytelling, drama, role-play, simulation, discussion, and debates.

Given the previous study, this research focuses on investigating the instructional strategies used by teachers in the English Proficiency Program (EPP) to enhance students' oral fluency in Muhammadiyah International Class Orientation (M-ICO) at an Islamic private junior high school in Sidoarjo. By exploring these strategies, the study seeks to provide insights and benefits for educators in teaching speaking skills effectively. Therefore, there are three research questions formulated in this study:

1. What are the teachers' instructional strategies to develop the students' oral fluency in teaching students at beginner level?
2. What are the challenges that the teachers face in using instructional strategies?
3. How do teachers overcome the speaking difficulties of beginner level students in the class?

METHOD
Research Design
This research is qualitative and categorized as a descriptive study that figured out the teachers' instructional strategies for enhancing students' oral fluency.
Setting
This study was conducted at one of the Islamic private schools in Sidoarjo which has an EPP (English Proficiency Program). The class in EPP is called Muhammadiyah International

Class Orientation (M-ICO). The curriculum that is used in this program is provided by ACT Global Solution.

Data Collection

The data was collected using interviews and classroom observations. The devices to collect the data were a voice recording, an interview questions list, video recordings, and an observation checklist. The subjects of this study are two speaking teachers who teach M-ICO class every Tuesday and Thursday. In analyzing the data, the researcher has some stages. First was familiarizing and organizing, then coding and reducing. The last was interpreting and representing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is addressing the answer to research questions that have been formulated in the introduction.

Teachers' Instructional Strategy
Strategies in Lesson Plan

To enhance students' oral fluency, teachers can utilize various strategies during their lessons. This serves as an alternative approach when activities are not running smoothly. Two teachers from the study, FJ and FB, demonstrate different characteristics in their teaching methods. FJ engages his students through group presentations, encouraging them to think and speak more. On the other hand, FB incorporates games into her lessons to keep her students engaged.

FJ acknowledges that his students are already fluent, with only a few requiring intensive treatment. However, he believes that incorporating something fun and presenting a general topic can be beneficial for his students. He selects topics that not only enhance their oral fluency but also encourage critical thinking. He stated, *"It is not only about speaking but also about elaborating their thinking and for the fluency of the students, I think, before I come to this class, they were so fluent. I think, something fun and something general are very match and appropriate for them."*

In an observation of FJ's class, students enthusiastically presented topics such as 'The Freedom of Prophet Muhammad' and 'The Freedom of America,' which sparked engaging discussions among their peers.

Similarly, FB also focuses on making the learning process enjoyable by incorporating game-based learning to improve her students' oral fluency. She states that games are highly effective in enhancing speaking skills, particularly oral fluency. During two class observations, FB employed games like the "TRUE-FALSE GAME" and the "WHISPER GAME." These activities motivated students to speak and listen attentively.

Despite not explicitly designing lesson plans, both teachers possess a deep understanding of their students. They are adept at recognizing and addressing any challenges that arise during lessons by employing various strategies. This aligns with Moore's (2014) notion that instructional strategies are essential in achieving desired learning outcomes. FJ utilizes social-general topics to capture students' interest, as evident in the class observations. On the other hand, FB incorporates games to engage students and enhance their oral fluency. Both teachers demonstrate an awareness of the importance of strategic teaching practices in boosting students' oral fluency.

Choosing Learning Materials

To support students' oral fluency, the selection of appropriate learning materials plays a crucial role. Both teachers in this study share a similar perspective on the importance of choosing materials that facilitate speaking activities.

FJ emphasizes the significance of selecting learning materials that encourage critical thinking about social situations such as the environment, education, freedom, and economics. He stated, "*Sometimes, I pick some special moment of our prophet to the material that I taught. Maybe how our prophet can change the situation at that time: slavery, gender discrimination, and something like that.*" He believes that these topics provide new insights and have practical relevance for his students' future. During class observation, FJ's students demonstrated enthusiasm while discussing the topic of 'freedom' under his supervision, even though they occasionally used Bahasa Indonesia.

In contrast, FB does not have specific criteria for selecting learning materials. Instead, she focuses on choosing materials connected to speaking skills, such as descriptive tasks, role plays, and presentations. Her approach aims to enhance students' ability to express themselves and engage in oral communication.

While this study was conducted in an Islamic school, the integration of Islamic materials in teaching practice was not observed in either teacher's class. According to a study conducted by Efrizal in 2020, the participants show interest in speaking when they use Islamic topics or values. However, an interesting observation was made in FJ's class where students independently chose an Islamic topic, specifically 'The Freedom of Prophet Muhammad,' thus incorporating their own learning material with Islamic values. FJ mentioned the possibility of integrating more critical analysis of Islamic materials in the future, focusing on the historical context and how Prophet Muhammad addressed issues such as slavery and gender discrimination.

Both FJ and FB have their criteria for selecting learning materials that align with their teaching goals. Rossiter et al. (2010) suggest that learning materials should include activities

such as consciousness-raising tasks, repetition tasks, the use of formulaic sequences, discourse markers, and communicative free-production activities to enhance oral fluency. However, neither teacher in this study strictly adhered to these criteria, opting for their versions based on their teaching objectives. FJ prioritizes materials that foster critical thinking and speaking abilities related to social, political, and economic issues, while FB chooses materials that have a direct connection to speaking skills.

Choosing an Appropriate Teaching Method

The teaching method is crucial in enhancing students' oral fluency, and both teachers in this study employ different approaches. FJ, who emphasizes critical thinking, utilizes Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to encourage his students to speak. He values personal connections with his students and avoids blaming them for mistakes or incorrect answers. FJ believes in building personal trust to create a conducive learning environment as he stated in the interview: *"I think the Communication Language Teaching (CLT). I love to do that. I like to come to my students and ask them "how's your day?" or something like the teacher never asks them. It's like a personal approach about them. Because I believe that when we can build personal trust, they will accept everything that we say."*

On the other hand, FB focuses on engaging students through game-based learning and discovery learning. Class observations reveal that she heavily relies on game-based learning as a teaching method. FB's approach aligns with the principles of CLT, even though she does not explicitly mention it.

According to Brown (2001), teaching methods are classroom specifications designed to achieve linguistic objectives. In the context of the speaking class investigated in this study, the aim is to develop students' confidence and fluency in speaking. FJ's use of CLT as a facilitative approach aligns with Larsen & Anderson's (2011) focus on fluency rather than error correction. Similarly, FB's incorporation of game-based learning reflects the principles of CLT, which includes the use of games in the learning process.

Therefore, appropriate teaching methods are essential for enhancing students' oral fluency. FJ's use of CLT and personal connections, as well as FB's focus on game-based learning, demonstrate their efforts to create an engaging and conducive learning environment for their students. Both teachers align with the principles of CLT, which prioritize fluency and active student participation.

Choosing Instructional Techniques

Both teachers in this study implement instructional techniques, specifically questioning, to facilitate learning. FJ utilizes questioning as a way to engage students and encourage critical

thinking. He does not follow a specific instructional technique but uses questioning to preface and conclude lessons, aiming to help students reflect and think. In both class observations, FJ extensively employs questioning to capture students' attention, promote participation, and elicit responses from peers.

On the other hand, FB emphasizes reflection as her primary instructional technique. She believes that reflection fosters communication and allows students to share their learning experiences. However, during the class observation, FB did not provide opportunities for students to reflect on what they had learned. Instead, she relied more on instructions while guiding the game-based activities.

Instructional techniques, such as questioning, are essential details in teaching practices. Callahan et al. (2009) define techniques as steps in teaching, including questioning, students' contributions, and reinforcement. FJ's use of questioning aligns with Moore's (2014) theory, as his lesson plans incorporate students' ideas and online resources. Similarly, FB employs reinforcing techniques by offering compliments to students who answer questions correctly. However, FB did not fully implement the technique of reflection as she mentioned in the interview.

In summary, both teachers employ instructional techniques, primarily questioning, in their teaching practices. FJ uses questioning extensively to engage students and promote critical thinking, while FB emphasizes reflection, although it was not fully observed during the class. These instructional techniques align with the broader theories and definitions of techniques in teaching.

Challenges in Speaking Class

In the speaking classes observed in this study, teachers faced various challenges related to noise levels, student shyness, lack of motivation, and linguistic difficulties. FJ mentioned that his class sometimes becomes noisy due to the boys' disruptive behavior. He expressed his struggle in managing the noise and mentioned that some students ask him to hang out instead of focusing on the lesson. In response, he implemented strategies to create a conducive class environment, such as emphasizing the importance of listening when he speaks.

In contrast, FB's class was not noisy, but she observed that many students were shy, anxious, and unmotivated. She noted that their lack of confidence might be the reason for their limited English speaking. FJ also encountered students who lacked confidence in speaking English and believed that their reluctance to speak stemmed from their lack of self-assurance.

The issue of confidence and inhibition can lead to students speaking more in their mother tongue and less in the target language. Both teachers and students were observed frequently using

Bahasa Indonesia during the classes. To address this, FJ consistently reminded his students to speak in English and encouraged them to use the target language. This approach aimed to increase the frequency of English usage in the class.

Teaching speaking is challenging as it requires addressing multiple factors for learners to become fluent and effective communicators. The challenges observed in the classes, such as noise and student reticence, align with the findings of Hosni's (2014) study on speaking difficulties, which encompass linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for creating a supportive learning environment and fostering oral fluency.

Teachers' Strategy in Overcoming Speaking Difficulties
Giving Challenge or Game

In speaking class, teachers often face the challenge of students lacking confidence in speaking. This can be due to limited vocabulary or shyness. Similarly, in this study, teachers reported students lacking confidence in speaking English during interviews. To address this, strategies were implemented to enhance their speaking ability and oral fluency.

FJ, a speaking teacher for 9A, personally called students and encouraged them to speak in English. He also challenged a quiet student to be a group leader, which improved her speaking skills. FB, on the other hand, used fun activities like games and brainstorming to engage her students and gradually enhance their speaking ability.

Though their approaches differ, both teachers aim to facilitate students in speaking English fluently. Their strategies align with Rianingsih (2015).

Checking Dictionary and Modeling the Pronunciation

Linguistic difficulties are common challenges for second language learners, including unfamiliarity with word meanings, sentence construction, and pronunciation. To address these issues, teachers act as facilitators and encourage students to use technology, such as dictionaries on smartphones or online platforms, to independently search for word meanings and pronunciations.

FJ allows students to translate difficult words using their smartphones, correcting any pronunciation errors. He emphasizes self-reliance by stating, "Yeah, translate it into English," and "OK, English please. You can translate it on Google Translate."

FB also advises students to bring English dictionaries, suggesting they try finding unfamiliar words themselves. If they still struggle, she provides guidance and explanations.

This strategy aligns with a study by Rezeki, Sujarwo, and Ibrahim (2022), which highlights the importance of discussions and dictionary use. FJ and FB encourage students to discuss with

peers and resort to explanations when necessary. However, during the class observation, FB did not conduct a discussion due to the nature of the game being played.

Furthermore, integrating technology in the classroom is recommended in the digital era, as emphasized by Moore (2014), who provides detailed tips on leveraging technology for learning.

Tolerating Speak Using Mother Tongue

L2 learners, including those in this study, tend to use their mother tongue during class. Both teachers tolerate mixed language usage (Indonesian and English) because students often explain important concepts more effectively in their native language to avoid misunderstandings. In a four-meeting observation, both teachers and students used a combination of Indonesian and English. FJ emphasized that the essence lies not in speaking 100% English, but in the valuable ideas students contribute. FJ stated, *"If they can't express the word in English, I let them speak in Indonesian."* However, the teachers frequently reminded students to speak in the target language by saying, *"In English, please."*

One of the teachers occasionally sets the expectation for students to use English exclusively during class. He stated, "*The first time I come to this class, I will ask them, 'I need you to use 100% English.' They will understand and strive to meet my expectation. If I don't say something like that, it means I allow them to speak in Indonesian, or in other words, a mix of Indonesian and English."* Thus, students make an effort to speak in the target language.

Motivating and Normalizing

Lack of confidence often leads L2 learners to feel inhibited, shy, and afraid of making mistakes. This is also evident in this study. Both teachers emphasized that they do not blame students for making mistakes. FB stated that making mistakes is a normal part of being human and encouraged students not to worry about them. She uses motivation to enhance students' oral fluency and normalize the process of making mistakes in learning. "*The first thing I do is motivate the students by explaining that making mistakes is human nature, and even teachers make mistakes,"* said FB. Similarly, FJ shares the same view, stating that he doesn't mind when students make mistakes since they are Indonesian learners of English, not native speakers. FJ said, *"I don't mind if it's a mistake because I understand that we are Indonesians, not English speakers."*

Both teachers encounter the challenge of students being shy and fearful of making mistakes. They tolerate the use of Indonesian by students and do not overly criticize their mistakes. FJ recognizes that his class consists of English foreign learners and acknowledges that they may make grammatical errors. He values critical thinking and ideas over grammatical

correctness. FB adopts a similar approach, motivating students to speak up and normalizing their mistakes. This speaking difficulty aligns with the instructional strategy of communication and motivation discussed in Moore's (2014) book. Effective communication, be it verbal, vocal, physical, or situational, can greatly impact student engagement and achievement. If teachers fail to communicate with an appropriate tone, they may struggle to motivate students. Therefore, FB and FJ wisely refrain from criticizing students' errors while still providing feedback to track their learning progress.

CONCLUSION

In the M-ICO class, both teachers have their teaching concerns and similarities. They design spontaneous lesson plans and choose engaging learning materials for frequent student speaking. However, they do not integrate Islamic materials. FJ focuses on student-led activities using the CLT method, while FB uses game-based learning for a fun classroom environment. Both classes face similar challenges, including classroom management, linguistic difficulties, mother tongue usage, and inhibition. Students are often shy, anxious, and lack confidence in speaking English, relying more on their mother tongue. To overcome speaking difficulties, both teachers employ strategies such as fun challenges and games. They encourage students to check dictionaries and provide examples of correct pronunciation. They tolerate mother tongue use to alleviate students' fear of making mistakes, normalizing errors, and motivating them.

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