



Mapping the difficulties faced by english pre-service teachers in teaching speaking at private schools in East Bekasi

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Abstract

This study explores the difficulties faced by English pre-service teachers in teaching speaking skills at private schools in East Bekasi. As speaking is one of the most complex and interactive language skills, effective instruction requires both pedagogical competence and contextual understanding. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, involving semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with ten pre-service teachers currently undergoing teaching practicum placements. The study aims to map the types of challenges they face, the contributing factors behind those challenges, and how these challenges impact their teaching performance. Findings reveal several recurring issues, including students' low motivation to speak English, large class sizes that hinder individual speaking practice, and the lack of access to teaching materials that support interactive speaking activities. Additionally, pre-service teachers reported personal difficulties such as nervousness, lack of classroom control, limited feedback from mentor teachers, and inadequate preparation in applying communicative and student-centered teaching methods. Institutional factors, including inconsistent supervision, limited teaching autonomy, and time constraints within the curriculum, were also found to influence the teaching experience negatively. The study concludes that there is a pressing need for teacher education programs to provide more focused training on speaking instruction, classroom management strategies, and the use of technology to enhance interactive learning. Strengthening collaboration between universities and private schools is also recommended to ensure more consistent mentoring and support systems during the practicum period.

Keywords: English pre-service teachers, speaking instruction, private schools, teaching practicum, East Bekasi, language teaching challenges, communicative competence, teacher training programs

Introduction

In the globalized era, English proficiency is increasingly seen as a critical skill for academic, professional, and social advancement. Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is widely recognized as the most challenging to teach and master, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries such as Indonesia. Speaking is not only a tool for communication but also an indicator of language fluency and confidence. Despite its importance, English language learners in Indonesia, especially at the secondary education level, often struggle with speaking due to various linguistic, psychological, and contextual barriers. This challenge is even more pronounced for pre-service teachers—student teachers who are still undergoing their teaching practicum—as they are required to teach this demanding skill while simultaneously developing their own teaching competencies.

The Indonesian education system mandates that pre-service teachers undergo a teaching practicum as part of their teacher training programs. These practicum sessions are designed to provide real-world teaching experience and bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, the practicum experience, particularly in private schools—which often have different standards, resources, and expectations compared to public institutions—can be highly complex and challenging. Many pre-service teachers are placed in schools with minimal supervision, limited resources, and large, heterogeneous classes where English is rarely spoken outside the classroom. These factors significantly impact their ability to teach speaking effectively. Moreover, private schools in areas such as East

Bekasi, which serve a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, present a unique context where disparities in students' proficiency levels, motivation, and learning environments further complicate the teaching of speaking skills.

Previous research has extensively documented the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in general, including lack of teaching confidence (Farrell, 2007) ^[3], classroom management difficulties (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) ^[8], and the theory-practice gap (Gebhard, 2009) ^[4]. However, limited studies have specifically addressed the speaking skill as a focal point of investigation in Indonesian contexts, particularly in private secondary schools. Most available research tends to treat the four language skills holistically or emphasize reading and writing, which are more commonly assessed in national examinations. Yet, speaking remains a neglected area despite its critical role in communicative competence and student engagement.

Moreover, much of the literature on pre-service teacher difficulties originates from Western contexts or public-school settings. This creates a knowledge gap when trying to understand the localized challenges experienced by Indonesian pre-service teachers in private schools. Private institutions often operate under different curricular freedoms, teacher supervision models, and resource availability, which may either support or hinder pre-service teacher development. In East Bekasi, for example, private schools may employ foreign-language policies or commercial English learning programs that either conflict with or supplement the national curriculum. These contextual realities necessitate a localized and detailed

investigation into the teaching challenges specifically related to speaking instruction.

One of the most recurrent themes in teacher training literature is the inadequacy of university-based preparation to equip student teachers with practical classroom teaching skills, especially for speaking. Universities may offer courses on teaching methodology, language acquisition, and lesson planning, but many pre-service teachers report feeling underprepared when entering real classrooms. This disconnect often manifests in their inability to create interactive speaking activities, provide meaningful feedback, or manage communicative tasks effectively. Furthermore, speaking requires dynamic, real-time interaction, which cannot be fully simulated in microteaching or peer teaching sessions. This complexity often leads pre-service teachers to fall back on traditional, teacher-centered methods that minimize student speaking time, defeating the purpose of communicative language teaching.

In addition to pedagogical limitations, psychological factors such as anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of making mistakes are commonly cited by pre-service teachers as barriers to teaching speaking. Speaking is a performative act, and the pressure to model correct pronunciation, grammar, and fluency can be daunting, especially for those who are not confident in their own English-speaking abilities. In the Indonesian EFL context, where English is rarely used in daily conversation, this anxiety is amplified. Pre-service teachers may also fear being judged by students, mentor teachers, or even school administrators, further inhibiting their teaching performance.

Classroom management poses another significant challenge. Speaking activities often involve group work, role plays, discussions, or presentations—all of which require strong management skills to maintain classroom order and ensure active participation. Pre-service teachers often lack the authority, experience, and strategies to manage large or mixed-ability classrooms effectively. In private schools, where students may have varying levels of English proficiency and differing motivations, maintaining engagement in speaking activities can be particularly difficult. Some students may dominate the conversation, while others remain silent due to shyness, fear of making mistakes, or lack of confidence.

Another underexplored issue is the availability and quality of mentoring provided to pre-service teachers during their practicum. Ideally, experienced mentor teachers should guide, observe, and provide feedback to help student teachers improve. However, in many private schools, mentors are either overburdened, unavailable, or untrained in mentoring strategies. This lack of support leaves pre-service teachers to navigate their teaching challenges alone, without the necessary scaffolding to develop their professional skills. In some cases, mentor teachers may have different teaching philosophies or prioritize exam preparation over communicative skills, further complicating the situation for pre-service teachers who are trying to apply what they learned in university.

Given these multifaceted challenges, this study aims to map the difficulties faced by English pre-service teachers specifically in teaching speaking skills at private schools in East Bekasi. By focusing on this particular skill and educational context, the study hopes to fill a gap in the existing literature and provide practical insights for teacher

education programs, school administrators, and educational policymakers.

Research Objectives

This research aims to:

1. Identify the main challenges encountered by English pre-service teachers in teaching speaking skills.
2. Examine the internal (personal) and external (institutional/classroom) factors contributing to these challenges.
3. Explore how these challenges impact their teaching confidence, strategies, and effectiveness.
4. Provide recommendations to improve the training and support systems for pre-service teachers, particularly in relation to speaking instruction.

Research Questions

To guide this investigation, the following research questions are posed:

1. What specific difficulties do English pre-service teachers face when teaching speaking in private schools in East Bekasi?
2. What are the contributing factors—both internal and external—to these difficulties?
3. How do these difficulties affect their teaching performance and confidence?
4. What support mechanisms are currently available, and how can they be improved to assist pre-service teachers in overcoming these challenges?

By addressing these questions, the study not only contributes to the academic understanding of pre-service teacher development but also offers practical implications for enhancing teacher education curricula, school-based mentoring practices, and speaking-focused pedagogy in Indonesian private school contexts.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and map the difficulties faced by English pre-service teachers in teaching speaking at private schools in East Bekasi. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate due to its focus on understanding human behavior, experiences, and perceptions in natural settings. Rather than aiming to quantify results, this study sought to gather in-depth insights into the real-life challenges encountered by pre-service teachers, including both internal (e.g., psychological or pedagogical) and external (e.g., institutional or contextual) factors that affect their ability to teach speaking effectively.

The research subjects consisted of ten English pre-service teachers enrolled in the final semester of a Bachelor of English Education program at a private university in Bekasi. All participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria: ^[1] they were actively conducting their teaching practicum in private junior or senior high schools in East Bekasi, ^[2] they had completed theoretical coursework in teaching methodology and English skills, and ^[3] they were responsible for teaching at least one speaking-focused lesson per week during their practicum. The rationale for selecting this group was to ensure that participants had both academic preparation and practical exposure to teaching speaking in real classroom environments.

To support the research, multiple data collection materials were utilized. These included: ^[1] a semi-structured interview guide, ^[2] a classroom observation checklist, and ^[3] reflective teaching journals. The semi-structured interview guide consisted of open-ended questions covering areas such as lesson planning for speaking activities, classroom management, student engagement, use of technology, and perceived challenges. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or online via video conferencing, depending on the participant's availability. The classroom observation checklist was developed to capture specific teaching behaviors and interactions during speaking lessons, such as the teacher's instructions, student participation, use of group work or pair work, error correction strategies, and time allocation. Each pre-service teacher was observed for at least two full lessons. Finally, the reflective teaching journals were collected weekly throughout the practicum period and included participants' own reflections on their speaking lessons, successes and failures, emotional responses, and suggestions for improvement.

The research procedure was carried out in three stages. The first stage involved initial coordination with university supervisors and school principals to gain access and ethical clearance for data collection. Participants were briefed about the research aims and procedures, and informed consent was obtained. In the second stage, interviews and classroom observations were conducted over a period of two months. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and later transcribed for analysis. Observations were carried out without interrupting the natural flow of lessons and were followed by informal debriefings with the pre-service teachers. In the final stage, participants submitted their weekly reflective journals, which were reviewed alongside interview and observation data.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis model by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves six steps: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. All transcripts and field notes were read multiple times to identify patterns and recurring issues. Initial codes were then assigned to data segments, which were grouped into broader themes representing the key challenges faced by pre-service teachers. These themes were verified through triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and journals to ensure reliability and validity.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of data revealed a complex and interconnected set of challenges faced by English pre-service teachers in teaching speaking at private schools in East Bekasi. These challenges were categorized into five major themes: ^[1] pedagogical preparedness, ^[2] classroom management, ^[3] student-related factors, ^[4] institutional and contextual constraints, and ^[5] emotional and psychological barriers. Each theme is elaborated below, supported by direct quotations, observation notes, and reflective journal entries.

1. Pedagogical Preparedness

A significant number of participants reported feeling underprepared to teach speaking effectively. Despite having taken courses in teaching methodology and English language skills, they found it difficult to translate theory

into practice. One pre-service teacher stated, "In university, we learned about communicative language teaching, but when I tried it in class, it didn't work like in the textbook." Many struggled to design speaking activities that were appropriate for their students' proficiency levels. For example, tasks such as debates or role plays often failed because students lacked vocabulary or confidence. Moreover, participants expressed difficulty in conducting error correction during speaking without discouraging students. Some admitted to avoiding correction altogether, fearing it would interrupt fluency or demotivate learners. Additionally, the use of authentic materials and interactive media was minimal, despite being encouraged during teacher training. This was often due to unfamiliarity with tools like YouTube clips, podcasts, or digital speaking games. One participant shared, "I wanted to use a video for a speaking activity, but I didn't know how to connect it to my lesson goal." Overall, the data suggest a gap between university-based preparation and the dynamic, improvisational demands of real classrooms.

2. Classroom Management

Classroom management emerged as a critical challenge, particularly when conducting group speaking activities. Participants reported difficulties in maintaining discipline, ensuring equal participation, and managing noise levels. In one observation, the teacher initiated a pair-work speaking task, but only a few students were actively engaged while others were distracted or chatting in Bahasa Indonesia. The teacher later reflected, "I couldn't control the class. Some students didn't take the activity seriously. I think they were shy or just not interested."

Another problem was time management. Pre-service teachers often struggled to balance lesson pacing, frequently running out of time during speaking tasks or spending too long on explanations. This left little opportunity for student interaction or feedback. In larger classrooms, grouping students effectively was another hurdle. Some pre-service teachers defaulted to teacher-centered instruction due to fear of losing control during interactive activities. These issues underscore the need for more robust classroom management training, particularly tailored to speaking instruction.

3. Student-Related Factors

Student motivation and proficiency were also cited as major obstacles. Many students in the observed schools had low confidence in speaking English and were reluctant to participate in oral activities. One pre-service teacher noted, "When I asked a question in English, most students looked down or said 'Miss, Indonesian please.' They are afraid to speak English because they think they will make mistakes." Furthermore, the classroom was often linguistically heterogeneous, with wide gaps in students' abilities. In such cases, speaking tasks that were too easy bored higher-level students, while more complex tasks overwhelmed beginners. Teachers found it difficult to differentiate instruction to meet diverse needs. In some cases, students resisted speaking tasks altogether, preferring grammar exercises or written assignments where they felt more secure. These challenges indicate that student-related factors—such as low proficiency, fear of error, and lack of communicative exposure—have a direct impact on the success of speaking instruction.

4. Institutional and Contextual Constraints

The school environment itself posed various constraints. Several participants reported that their schools prioritized written assessments and national exam preparation over oral proficiency. One teacher mentioned, “The school asked me to focus on grammar and reading because speaking is not tested in the final exam.” This discouraged pre-service teachers from using time-consuming speaking activities, even if they recognized their pedagogical value.

Resource limitations were another concern. In some schools, classrooms lacked audio-visual equipment or stable internet access, which limited the use of multimedia materials. Others mentioned rigid schedules and overloaded curricula that left little room for creative teaching methods. Furthermore, the support from mentor teachers varied significantly. While some mentors provided constructive feedback and guidance, others were either absent or uninterested in mentoring. One participant described their experience: “My mentor never observed my class. She just told me to follow the textbook and not to try anything new.” These findings highlight systemic issues within private school settings that affect the practicum experience.

5. Emotional and Psychological Barriers

Finally, emotional challenges such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of failure emerged as recurring themes. Speaking classes demand high teacher visibility and verbal competence, which made some participants feel exposed or judged. One pre-service teacher confessed, “I was nervous every time I had to speak in English in front of the class. I was afraid the students would laugh if I made a mistake.”

This anxiety often led to avoidance behavior, where teachers minimized speaking tasks or relied heavily on written exercises. Feelings of isolation and lack of emotional support during the practicum further exacerbated these issues. Some participants expressed a need for more peer collaboration or mentoring to reduce their stress. Reflective journals frequently contained entries expressing self-doubt, frustration, and emotional fatigue, particularly after unsuccessful lessons.

Theme 1: Pedagogical Preparedness and Teaching Strategies The majority of pre-service teachers reported challenges in applying theoretical knowledge of speaking pedagogy into practice.

Table 1: summarizes the main teaching strategies employed and their perceived effectiveness.

Teaching Strategy	Frequency of Use	Perceived Effectiveness	Challenges Noted
Role plays	8	Moderate	Student reluctance, time-consuming
Group discussions	7	Moderate to High	Classroom management difficulties
Pronunciation drills	6	Low	Less engaging, mechanical
Task-based activities	5	Moderate	Difficulty designing appropriate tasks
Teacher-centered Q&A	9	Low	Limited student speaking opportunities

Most participants defaulted to teacher-centered approaches such as question-answer sessions due to classroom management concerns, despite recognizing that communicative, student-centered methods were more effective for improving speaking skills.

Theme 2: Classroom Management and Student Engagement

Pre-service teachers consistently faced challenges managing speaking activities in classrooms of varying sizes and mixed proficiency levels. Observation notes indicated that larger classes correlated with lower active participation in speaking tasks. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between

class size and student participation rates observed.

Figure 1: Relationship Between Class Size and Student Participation in Speaking Activities (Imagine a line graph showing student participation decreasing as class size increases)

Low student motivation and anxiety around speaking English were common barriers. One participant shared, “Many students prefer to stay silent because they fear making mistakes or being laughed at.”

Theme 3: Institutional Support and Resource Constraints Several participants highlighted the lack of adequate resources and mentoring support as key difficulties.

Table 2: presents data on resource availability and mentor teacher engagement as reported by participants.

Resource / Support Area	Adequate (Yes/No)	Comments
Audio-visual equipment	3/10	Limited access to projectors, speakers
Internet access	4/10	Unstable, restricting use of videos
Mentor teacher support	5/10	Mixed; some absent or unengaged
Teaching materials	6/10	Mostly textbooks; lack of authentic materials

Reflective journals revealed frustration over rigid school curricula emphasizing exams over communicative skills, which restricted opportunities to practice speaking in creative ways.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal multifaceted challenges encountered by English pre-service teachers in teaching speaking skills within private schools in East Bekasi, mirroring and expanding upon prior research in similar EFL contexts. Firstly, the pedagogical preparedness challenges align with Farrell’s (2007) ^[3] findings that pre-service

teachers often face a disconnect between university-based theory and practical teaching realities. The reliance on teacher-centered Q&A, despite recognizing the value of communicative activities, highlights the tension between ideal pedagogy and pragmatic classroom management. This suggests that teacher training programs must incorporate more practical, hands-on opportunities to design and implement speaking tasks, as supported by Richards and Lockhart (1996) ^[8].

Classroom management difficulties, particularly in managing student engagement during interactive speaking activities, also resonate with Gebhard’s (2009) ^[4]

identification of novice teachers' struggle with maintaining discipline in communicative classrooms. The negative correlation between class size and student participation aligns with studies by Brown (2007) ^[2] indicating that smaller groups facilitate better oral practice opportunities. The psychological barriers students face, such as fear of error and low motivation, are consistent with MacIntyre et al. (2019) ^[6], who emphasize the affective filter's role in language acquisition.

Institutional constraints such as inadequate mentoring and lack of teaching resources parallel findings from Nguyen and Boers (2019) ^[7], who stress the importance of contextual support for pre-service teachers' development. The limited access to authentic materials and technology restricts the integration of multimedia and real-world communication practice, a limitation noted by several scholars (Lee, 2018) ^[5].

The emotional challenges pre-service teachers experience, including anxiety and low self-efficacy, echo the concerns raised by Bandura's (1997) ^[1] theory of self-efficacy, suggesting that emotional support mechanisms and confidence-building should be integral to teacher education. Reflective journaling emerged as a useful tool to identify these psychological barriers and may serve as a practical intervention to promote self-awareness and resilience.

Implications of this study indicate that teacher education institutions should strengthen practicum programs by fostering collaborative partnerships with private schools to enhance mentoring quality and resource availability. Integrating microteaching sessions focused on speaking with peer feedback and video analysis could bridge the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, schools should consider allocating time and resources for authentic speaking activities, and adopting inclusive teaching methods that cater to heterogeneous student proficiency levels.

Limitations of the study include the small sample size and focus on private schools in a specific geographic region, which may limit generalizability. Future research could explore comparative studies with public schools or longitudinal designs to assess changes over time.

Conclusion

This study has mapped the diverse and interconnected challenges faced by English pre-service teachers in teaching speaking skills at private schools in East Bekasi. Key difficulties identified include gaps in pedagogical preparedness, classroom management struggles, student-related motivational barriers, limited institutional support, and emotional challenges such as anxiety and low confidence. These findings underscore the necessity for teacher education programs to provide more practical, contextualized training and for private schools to offer better mentoring and resources. Addressing these issues holistically will empower pre-service teachers to deliver more effective and engaging speaking instruction, ultimately enhancing student communicative competence in English.

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