



Challenges in English Speaking Skills Among EFL Students at The Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid

Tantangan yang Dihadapi Siswa EFL dalam Keterampilan Berbicara Bahasa Inggris pada Program Unggulan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial SMA Nurul Jadid

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Abstract

English speaking proficiency remains one of the greatest challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, particularly in Islamic boarding schools where opportunities for authentic English communication are limited. This study aimed to investigate the challenges encountered by EFL students in developing English speaking skills in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid, East Java, Indonesia. A mixed-method sequential explanatory design was employed by integrating classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and Likert-scale questionnaires to examine the influence of internal psychological factors and external environmental factors on students' speaking performance. The findings revealed that speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes were the primary internal barriers reducing students' willingness to communicate. In addition, teacher-centred instructional practices, limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice, insufficient constructive feedback, and restricted peer interaction were identified as significant external factors constraining students' oral communication. These findings indicate that English speaking proficiency is shaped by the interaction between psychological readiness and the learning environment rather than linguistic competence alone. This study contributes to the literature by integrating Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to explain speaking challenges in the context of Islamic boarding schools. Practically, the study recommends developing more communicative learning environments through structured conversation clubs, collaborative speaking activities, supportive teacher feedback, and increased opportunities for authentic English communication to strengthen students' confidence and willingness to communicate.

Kata Kunci

*Keterampilan
Berbicara;
Siswa EFL;
Sekolah
Berbasis
Pesantren;*

Abstrak

Kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris masih menjadi salah satu tantangan utama bagi siswa English as a Foreign Language (EFL), khususnya di sekolah berbasis pesantren yang memiliki kesempatan terbatas untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam komunikasi autentik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tantangan yang dihadapi siswa dalam mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara

Kepercayaan
Diri;
Lingkungan
Pembelajaran.

bahasa Inggris pada Program Unggulan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) SMA Nurul Jadid, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan *mixed-method sequential explanatory design* dengan mengintegrasikan observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan kuesioner skala Likert untuk mengkaji pengaruh faktor psikologis internal dan faktor lingkungan eksternal terhadap kemampuan berbicara siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan berbicara, rendahnya kepercayaan diri, dan rasa takut melakukan kesalahan merupakan hambatan internal utama yang menurunkan kemauan siswa untuk berkomunikasi. Selain itu, pembelajaran yang masih berpusat pada guru, terbatasnya kesempatan untuk praktik berbicara secara autentik, kurangnya umpan balik yang konstruktif, serta minimnya interaksi antarteman menjadi faktor eksternal yang menghambat perkembangan kemampuan berbicara siswa. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris dipengaruhi oleh interaksi antara kesiapan psikologis siswa dan lingkungan belajar, bukan semata-mata oleh kompetensi linguistik. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan *Affective Filter Hypothesis* dari Krashen dan *Teori Sosiokultural Vygotsky* untuk menjelaskan tantangan berbicara pada konteks sekolah berbasis pesantren. Secara praktis, penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengembangan lingkungan belajar yang lebih komunikatif melalui pembentukan klub percakapan, kegiatan berbicara kolaboratif, pemberian umpan balik yang suportif, serta peningkatan kesempatan berkomunikasi menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara autentik.

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INRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become one of the essential competencies required in the twenty-first century, particularly in educational settings where students are expected to participate in global academic, professional, and intercultural interactions (Ahmed, 2022; Budiyanto et al., 2024). Among the four macro language skills, speaking is considered the most demanding because it requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, communicative competence, and self-confidence simultaneously during real-time interaction. Consequently, speaking proficiency has become a key indicator of successful English language learning, especially for learners studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Zega, 2025). Recent studies have further demonstrated that successful oral communication is influenced not only by learners' linguistic competence but also by psychological, social, and environmental factors that shape their willingness to communicate in English (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024).

Despite continuous developments in English language instruction, speaking remains one of the most challenging productive skills among EFL learners worldwide. Many students encounter difficulties in expressing ideas orally because of limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical competence, pronunciation problems, and restricted opportunities for authentic communication (Al Awlaqi & Ghazali, 2023). Beyond these linguistic limitations, affective factors—including speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and low self-confidence—substantially reduce

students' participation in classroom interaction (Azhari et al., 2026). A recent systematic review of studies published between 2020 and 2025 identified speaking anxiety as one of the strongest predictors of poor speaking performance, with fear of making mistakes and unsupportive classroom environments consistently reported as the dominant contributing factors (Gunawan, 2026).

To address these challenges, recent pedagogical developments have emphasized communicative and technology-assisted language learning approaches that actively engage learners in meaningful interaction. Learner-centred instruction, collaborative speaking activities, and technology-supported practice have been shown to reduce foreign language anxiety while enhancing learners' willingness to communicate (Buddha et al., 2024; Mislawiyadi & Bari, 2025). Likewise, interactive learning environments provide opportunities for authentic communication in low-pressure situations, thereby improving students' confidence and speaking performance (Ayiz & Tauchid, 2025). These findings indicate that speaking competence should be viewed not merely as the outcome of linguistic knowledge but also as the result of supportive pedagogical practices that promote learners' emotional well-being and communicative confidence (Souzandehfar & Ibrahim, 2023).

Within the Indonesian context, improving English speaking competence remains a persistent challenge because English functions primarily as a foreign language with limited opportunities for authentic communication outside the classroom (Astuti et al., 2026). Most students acquire English through formal classroom instruction, while daily communication is predominantly conducted in Indonesian or local languages, resulting in limited exposure to meaningful English interaction (Baker et al., 2025). Consequently, speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and classroom learning environments continue to influence students' willingness to communicate (Marshallina, 2025). Furthermore, teacher-centred instructional practices and insufficient communicative activities often prevent learners from developing confidence and fluency in authentic speaking situations (Mustamir, 2024).

Within this national context, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) represent a unique educational environment in which religious education is integrated with formal academic learning. Besides following the national curriculum, students participate in various religious, social, and character-building activities that shape their daily learning experiences. Although this environment successfully develops students' discipline and character, it also presents distinctive challenges for English language learning. English is generally used only during classroom instruction, whereas daily communication is dominated by Indonesian, regional languages, or Arabic for religious purposes. Consequently, students have limited opportunities to practice English as a functional means of communication outside formal learning activities (Timur et al., 2024).

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated that EFL students in Islamic boarding schools encounter multidimensional barriers to developing English speaking proficiency. These barriers extend beyond linguistic limitations and encompass psychological, pedagogical, and sociocultural dimensions. Psychological factors, including speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, shyness, and fear of negative evaluation, remain the primary obstacles that discourage students from actively participating in oral communication. Simultaneously, limited exposure to English-speaking environments, inadequate opportunities for authentic interaction, and teacher-centred instructional practices further constrain students' speaking development. These findings suggest that improving speaking proficiency requires a comprehensive understanding of both learners' internal conditions and the educational environment in which language learning occurs (Bakhtiar & Suwandi, 2022).

Previous studies have investigated various strategies to enhance English speaking competence in Islamic educational settings. Bakhtiar & Suwandi (2022) reported that speaking anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and shyness significantly influenced students' speaking performance, with anxiety identified as the strongest predictor of low oral proficiency. Likewise, Timur et al. (2024) demonstrated that the integration of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) significantly improved students' speaking fluency and confidence by creating more interactive learning experiences and reducing communication anxiety. Furthermore, recent investigations into foreign language anxiety in multilingual Islamic boarding schools revealed that students' speaking behaviour is influenced not only by language proficiency but also by peer evaluation, institutional expectations, and limited opportunities for meaningful communication. These studies also emphasized that supportive peer relationships, constructive teacher feedback, and psychologically safe classroom environments play important roles in increasing students' willingness to communicate. In addition, empirical evidence indicates that Willingness to Communicate (WTC) functions as a significant mediator between speaking anxiety and speaking achievement, suggesting that students with lower anxiety are more likely to participate actively in English communication and demonstrate better speaking performance (Lin et al., 2025).

Although these studies have contributed substantially to the understanding of English speaking difficulties among EFL learners, several important research gaps remain. First, previous research has generally examined individual variables, such as speaking anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, willingness to communicate, or instructional strategies, independently. Consequently, limited attention has been given to understanding how internal psychological factors interact with external environmental factors in shaping students' speaking performance within the unique sociocultural context of Islamic boarding schools. Second, most empirical studies have been conducted in universities, public schools, or general secondary education, while relatively few have specifically investigated students enrolled in Islamic boarding schools that integrate formal education with residential and religious learning activities. Therefore, the contextual characteristics of pesantren, which may influence students' opportunities for authentic English communication, remain insufficiently explored. Third, while many previous studies have focused on evaluating the effectiveness of instructional interventions such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, or Computer-Assisted Language Learning, fewer studies have comprehensively explored the actual challenges experienced by students before instructional interventions are implemented. A deeper understanding of these challenges is essential for designing pedagogical strategies that are responsive to students' real learning needs rather than relying solely on generalized instructional models.

Based on these gaps, the present study investigates the challenges encountered by EFL students in developing English speaking skills in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid, an Islamic boarding school in East Java, Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on either psychological or pedagogical perspectives, this study adopts an integrated analytical perspective by examining the interaction between internal factors, including self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and motivation, and external factors, including teaching methods, peer interaction, teacher support, and opportunities for authentic English communication. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of students' speaking experiences, this study employs a mixed-methods approach by integrating classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and Likert-scale questionnaires.

The novelty of this study lies in three important contributions. First, it integrates Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to explain English speaking challenges within the distinctive educational environment of an Islamic

boarding school. Second, it provides empirical evidence regarding the interaction between psychological and environmental factors influencing students' speaking performance through methodological triangulation, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding than studies relying on a single research method. Third, this study proposes context-specific pedagogical recommendations for Islamic boarding schools by emphasizing the development of communicative learning environments, structured conversation clubs, collaborative speaking activities, and supportive teacher feedback to reduce speaking anxiety and strengthen students' willingness to communicate.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the challenges faced by EFL students in developing English speaking skills in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid. Specifically, it seeks to identify the internal and external factors influencing students' speaking performance, examine how the Islamic boarding school learning environment shapes students' willingness to communicate in English, and formulate pedagogical recommendations that support more communicative, interactive, and student-centred English language instruction. It is expected that the findings of this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on EFL speaking development while providing practical implications for improving English language teaching practices in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

Identification of Problems

Based on the background of the study, the following problems have been identified as contributing to the low English speaking proficiency among EFL students in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid:

1. Students experience psychological barriers, including speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation, which reduce their willingness to communicate in English.
2. Students have limited opportunities to practice English in authentic communicative situations, as English is primarily used during classroom instruction, while daily communication is dominated by Indonesian, local languages, and Arabic.
3. The implementation of communicative English language teaching remains suboptimal, as classroom instruction is still predominantly teacher-centred and provides insufficient opportunities for interactive speaking practice.
4. The interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental factors influencing students' English speaking skills in the Islamic boarding school context has not been comprehensively investigated, creating a need for further empirical research.

Formulation of the Problem

Based on the identified problems, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges are encountered by EFL students in developing English speaking skills in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid?
2. How do internal psychological factors, including speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, influence students' English speaking skills?

3. How do external environmental factors, including teaching methods, peer interaction, teacher support, and opportunities for authentic English communication, influence students' English speaking skills?
4. What pedagogical recommendations can be proposed to improve English speaking instruction in the context of Islamic boarding schools?

Objectives and Benefits of Research

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Identify the challenges encountered by EFL students in developing English speaking skills in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid.
2. Examine the influence of internal factors, including speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, on students' English speaking skills.
3. Analyze the influence of external factors, including teaching methods, peer interaction, teacher support, and the Islamic boarding school learning environment, on students' English speaking skills.
4. Formulate pedagogical recommendations to enhance English speaking instruction in Islamic boarding schools.

Research Benefits

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretical Benefits

This study is expected to enrich the body of literature on EFL speaking skills by applying Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory within the specific and underexplored context of Islamic boarding schools, thereby strengthening the theoretical understanding of how affective and sociocultural factors interact in a religiously oriented learning environment.

Practical Benefits

- For students, the findings are expected to increase awareness of the psychological and environmental factors affecting their English speaking performance while encouraging greater participation in authentic speaking activities.
- For English teachers, this study provides practical insights into designing communicative, interactive, and learner-centred instructional strategies that reduce speaking anxiety and improve students' willingness to communicate.
- For school administrators and policymakers, the findings may serve as empirical evidence for developing English language curricula, teacher professional development programs, and supportive learning environments that promote speaking competence in Islamic boarding schools.

- For future researchers, this study offers a theoretical and empirical reference for further investigations into English speaking development, particularly those examining the interaction between psychological, pedagogical, and sociocultural factors in Islamic boarding school contexts or similar educational environments.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives that explain the psychological and environmental determinants of English speaking development among EFL learners.

The first perspective concerns the role of affective factors in second language speaking. Recent research has consistently demonstrated that speaking anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate are among the strongest predictors of students' speaking performance. Learners experiencing high levels of foreign language anxiety tend to participate less actively in classroom interaction, whereas those with greater self-confidence and stronger motivation demonstrate higher levels of oral proficiency and communicative engagement (Lin et al., 2025). Recent systematic evidence further confirms that emotional factors regulate learners' readiness to communicate and substantially influence speaking achievement across diverse EFL contexts (Gunawan, 2026). Therefore, this study adopts the affective perspective as a theoretical foundation for explaining the psychological barriers influencing English speaking development.

The second perspective emphasizes the importance of the social and instructional learning environment in developing speaking competence. Contemporary sociocultural research suggests that language learning develops through meaningful interaction, collaborative learning, teacher scaffolding, and supportive classroom environments that encourage active participation in authentic communication. Studies have shown that communicative teaching practices, peer collaboration, and technology-supported learning environments significantly improve students' confidence, willingness to communicate, and speaking performance while reducing communication anxiety (Souzandehfar & Ibrahim, 2023; Timur et al., 2024). These findings indicate that environmental support plays a crucial role in facilitating students' oral language development.

Based on these perspectives, this study assumes that English speaking performance is influenced by the interaction between internal psychological factors (speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation) and external environmental factors (teaching methods, teacher support, peer interaction, and opportunities for authentic communication). Accordingly, the present study integrates affective and sociocultural perspectives to provide a comprehensive explanation of English speaking challenges experienced by EFL students in the Islamic boarding school context.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies, this study conceptualizes English speaking proficiency as a multidimensional outcome resulting from the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental factors. Internal psychological factors include speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, all of which have consistently been identified as significant predictors of learners' willingness to communicate and speaking performance in EFL contexts

(Teimouri et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2025). Students who experience lower levels of speaking anxiety and possess higher levels of self-confidence and motivation are generally more willing to engage in oral communication, resulting in better speaking performance.

In addition to psychological factors, external environmental factors also play a crucial role in facilitating English speaking development. Teaching methods, teacher support, peer interaction, classroom climate, and opportunities for authentic English communication provide the social context in which learners develop communicative competence. Previous studies have demonstrated that communicative teaching practices, collaborative learning, constructive teacher feedback, and supportive classroom environments significantly enhance students' willingness to communicate while simultaneously reducing speaking anxiety (Souzandehfar & Ibrahim, 2023; Timur et al., 2024; Mislawiyadi & Bari, 2025). These findings indicate that speaking competence is influenced not only by learners' psychological readiness but also by the quality of the learning environment in which communication takes place.

Drawing upon these perspectives, this study assumes that internal psychological factors and external environmental factors interact dynamically rather than functioning independently. The interaction between these factors influences students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which subsequently affects their English speaking performance (Lin et al., 2025). Therefore, English speaking proficiency is viewed as the outcome of the interplay between learners' psychological conditions and the educational environment provided by the Islamic boarding school.

To provide a clearer understanding of the relationships among the variables investigated in this study, the conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1. The framework illustrates how the Islamic boarding school learning context shapes both internal psychological factors and external environmental factors, which together influence students' willingness to communicate and ultimately determine their English speaking performance.

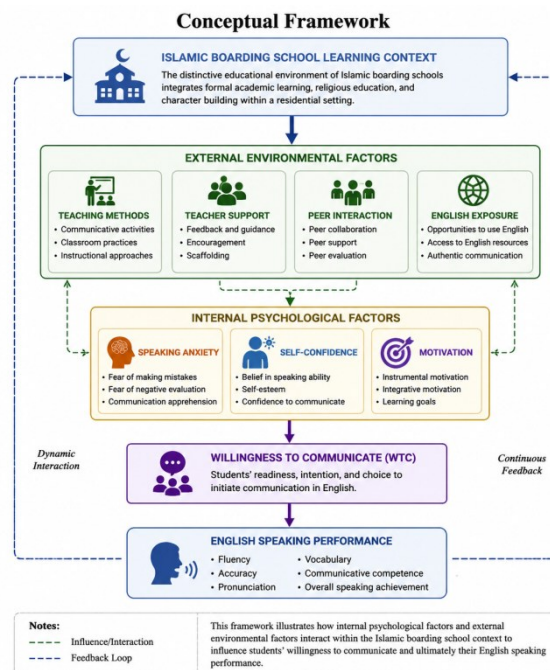


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual framework begins with the Islamic Boarding School Learning Context, which represents the educational setting in which English learning occurs. This context includes teaching methods, teacher support, peer interaction, classroom climate, and opportunities for authentic English communication. These contextual elements influence both internal psychological factors, including speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, and external environmental factors, including instructional support and communicative learning opportunities. The interaction between these factors determines students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which functions as an important mediating construct linking learners' psychological readiness with their actual English speaking performance. Consequently, students who experience supportive learning environments and positive psychological conditions are expected to demonstrate greater willingness to communicate and achieve better speaking proficiency.

This conceptual framework serves as the basis for developing the research instruments, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and Likert-scale questionnaires. Furthermore, it guides the interpretation of the research findings by explaining how psychological and environmental factors interact in influencing English speaking skills among EFL students in the Islamic boarding school context.

RESEARCH METHODS

This section elaborates the overall research methods employed in this study, covering the research approach, population and sample, research instruments, validity and reliability of the instruments, and the procedure through which the research was carried out. These elements provide the methodological foundation that underlies the more detailed methodology described in the following section.

Research Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered by EFL students in developing English speaking skills. Mixed-methods research is widely recognized as an effective approach for investigating complex educational phenomena because it enables researchers to integrate numerical evidence with participants' lived experiences, thereby producing richer interpretations and stronger research inferences (Aramide et al., 2023).

This study adopted a sequential explanatory design, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed in the first phase, followed by qualitative data to explain, elaborate, and validate the quantitative findings. The integration of both datasets provides complementary evidence and improves the credibility of the research findings through methodological integration (Aramide et al., 2023).

The qualitative component consisted of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted to examine students' speaking behaviour, classroom interaction, and instructional practices in their natural learning environment. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently employed to obtain deeper insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to English speaking development, allowing participants to explain issues that could not be fully captured through quantitative data alone (Fàbregues et al., 2023).

The quantitative component employed a Likert-scale questionnaire to measure students' perceptions regarding internal psychological factors, including speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, as well as external environmental factors, including teaching methods, teacher support, peer interaction, and opportunities for authentic English communication. Likert-type rating scales remain one of the most widely accepted instruments for measuring attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural tendencies because they enable respondents to express the intensity of their agreement with structured statements while producing quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis (Dalka et al., 2022).

Finally, qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated through methodological triangulation to strengthen the validity of the study and provide a more holistic understanding of the interaction between psychological and environmental factors influencing English speaking skills among EFL students in the Islamic boarding school context. The integration of multiple data sources is considered one of the principal strengths of mixed-methods research because it improves the credibility, completeness, and interpretability of research findings (Lorenzini et al., 2024).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all students enrolled in the flagship Social Sciences Program at Nurul Jadid High School. From this population, a sample of five students was selected using purposive sampling, based on the criteria that they were actively studying English at the Islamic boarding school and had varied prior experiences in using the language. Although the sample size is small, it is considered adequate for a qualitatively driven mixed-method study aiming to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' speaking difficulties rather than statistical generalization.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data in this study. *First*, an observation checklist was used to record students' verbal participation, interaction patterns, and responses during speaking activities in the classroom. *Second*, a semi-structured interview guide, developed based on the indicators of speaking anxiety and confidence identified in the literature review, was used to explore students' experiences in greater depth. *Third*, a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of statements covering vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, confidence, learning environment, and grammar was used to quantify students' perceptions of their speaking difficulties.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

To ensure the validity of the interview guide and questionnaire, both instruments were reviewed by an expert in English language teaching to check their content relevance and clarity of language before being used in the field. Data triangulation, achieved by cross-checking findings from observation, interviews, and the questionnaire, was applied to strengthen the credibility of the qualitative findings. For the quantitative instrument, the internal consistency of the questionnaire items was examined descriptively across the five indicators to ensure that the items consistently reflected students' perceptions of their speaking difficulties.

Research Procedure

The research was carried out in three main stages. In the preparation stage, the researcher conducted a preliminary literature review, developed the research instruments, and obtained permission from the school to conduct the study. In the implementation stage, classroom observations were carried out over a two-week period, followed by semi-structured interviews with the five selected participants and the distribution of the Likert-scale questionnaire. In the final stage, the data obtained from all three instruments were organized, analyzed, and interpreted to answer the research questions formulated earlier, and conclusions and recommendations were subsequently drawn based on the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Findings from Classroom Observation

Classroom observations revealed that most students demonstrated limited participation during English speaking activities. Throughout the observation sessions, students tended to remain passive and rarely volunteered to answer questions or express opinions in English. When the teacher invited students to speak, many responded only briefly and avoided extending their responses. Several students hesitated before speaking and frequently switched to Indonesian when they encountered vocabulary difficulties.

The observation also showed that classroom interaction was predominantly teacher-centred. Students mainly responded to teachers' questions instead of engaging in peer discussions or collaborative speaking activities. Consequently, opportunities to practice authentic oral communication remained limited. In addition, observable signs of speaking anxiety—including hesitation, avoidance of eye contact, nervous laughter, and prolonged silence—were frequently identified during classroom speaking tasks.

Overall, the observational findings indicate that students experienced considerable difficulties in participating actively in English speaking activities despite demonstrating adequate understanding of lesson content.

Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students to obtain deeper insights into the challenges they experienced in developing English speaking skills. Analysis of the interview data revealed three dominant themes: speaking anxiety and lack of confidence, insufficient opportunities for speaking practice, and limited instructional support.

The first theme concerned psychological barriers. All participants admitted experiencing anxiety whenever they were required to speak English in front of classmates.

Participant 1 explained that speaking English often caused nervousness because of fear of making grammatical mistakes. Likewise, Participant 2 stated that embarrassment about incorrect pronunciation reduced willingness to participate during classroom discussions. Participant 3 similarly admitted preferring to remain silent rather than risk making mistakes before peers.

The second theme related to limited speaking practice. Participants consistently reported that classroom activities focused more on grammar and reading than communicative interaction. Participant 4 stated that although grammatical concepts were generally understood, opportunities to use English in authentic communication remained very

limited. Consequently, students felt unprepared when asked to perform oral presentations.

The final theme concerned teacher support. Participant 5 explained that teachers generally corrected mistakes but rarely provided constructive feedback that encouraged continued communication. Other participants similarly believed that additional communicative activities and supportive classroom interaction would help improve their speaking confidence.

These interview findings consistently indicate that psychological barriers and limited communicative opportunities jointly influence students' speaking performance.

Findings from Questionnaire

To complement the qualitative findings, students completed a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring perceptions of psychological and environmental factors affecting English speaking skills. The mean scores obtained from each indicator are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions toward English Speaking Challenges

Indicator	Mean Score	Interpretation
Self-confidence	2.5	Low
Vocabulary	2.8	Low
Pronunciation	2.6	Low
Learning Environment	3.0	Moderate

As presented in Table 4.1, self-confidence obtained the lowest mean score (2.5), indicating that students generally lacked confidence in communicating orally. Vocabulary mastery (2.8) and pronunciation (2.6) also received relatively low scores, suggesting that students perceived linguistic limitations during speaking activities. Meanwhile, the learning environment obtained a moderate score (3.0), implying that although some instructional support existed, the classroom atmosphere had not yet fully encouraged active oral communication.

Overall, the questionnaire findings are consistent with both classroom observations and interview results, demonstrating that students' speaking difficulties involve psychological, linguistic, and environmental dimensions.

Discussion

Challenges Encountered by EFL Students in Developing English Speaking Skills

The findings indicate that EFL students encountered multidimensional challenges in developing English speaking skills. Rather than being caused solely by limited linguistic competence, speaking difficulties emerged through the interaction of psychological, instructional, and environmental factors. Observation findings showed that students rarely participated actively in speaking activities, while interview data revealed that anxiety and fear of making mistakes discouraged students from communicating. Questionnaire findings further supported these observations by demonstrating low

levels of self-confidence and relatively limited perceptions of vocabulary and pronunciation competence.

These findings are consistent with Bakhtiar & Suwandi (2022), who identified speaking anxiety and low confidence as the primary barriers preventing students from participating actively in classroom interaction. Likewise, Gunawan (2026) reported that fear of negative evaluation remains one of the strongest predictors of poor speaking performance among EFL learners. However, the present study extends previous findings by demonstrating that these psychological barriers occur simultaneously with limited communicative opportunities within the Islamic boarding school environment.

Internal Psychological Factors Affecting English Speaking Skills

Speaking anxiety emerged as the strongest psychological factor influencing students' oral communication. Interview participants consistently admitted feeling nervous whenever they were required to speak English publicly, while classroom observations documented hesitation, silence, and avoidance behaviours.

These findings strongly support Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which argues that emotional variables—including anxiety and self-confidence—influence language acquisition by regulating learners' willingness to process and produce language. Although students possessed sufficient grammatical knowledge, high anxiety prevented them from utilizing this knowledge effectively during spontaneous communication.

Similarly, Lin et al. (2025) demonstrated that self-confidence significantly influences students' willingness to communicate, ultimately affecting speaking achievement. The present study supports this relationship by showing that confidence represents the lowest-rated psychological indicator among participants.

External Environmental Factors Affecting English Speaking Skills

The findings also demonstrate that the learning environment substantially influenced students' speaking development. Classroom observations revealed teacher-centred instruction with relatively few communicative speaking activities. Interview participants consistently emphasized the need for additional conversation practice, collaborative learning, and constructive teacher feedback.

These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that language develops through meaningful interaction and social collaboration. Students require opportunities to negotiate meaning, receive scaffolding from teachers, and communicate with peers in authentic contexts.

The findings correspond closely with Timur et al. (2024), who found that communicative learning environments significantly enhance speaking confidence among Islamic boarding school students. Likewise, Souzandehfar & Ibrahim (2023) reported that collaborative learning and supportive teacher feedback reduce foreign language anxiety while increasing students' willingness to communicate.

Pedagogical Implications

The integration of observation, interview, and questionnaire findings demonstrates that improving students' speaking competence requires comprehensive instructional interventions rather than isolated grammar instruction. English teachers should adopt communicative teaching strategies such as role-playing, pair discussions, group presentations, and conversation clubs to increase students' opportunities for authentic communication.

Constructive feedback should also be emphasized to reduce students' fear of making mistakes. Instead of focusing primarily on grammatical accuracy, teachers should encourage students to express ideas confidently while providing supportive corrections after communication has occurred.

Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools should establish English-speaking environments outside formal classroom instruction through language clubs, English days, peer mentoring, and extracurricular speaking programmes. Such initiatives would increase students' exposure to authentic communication while gradually strengthening their willingness to communicate.

Research Limitations

Although this study provides significant insights into the challenges faced by students in mastering English speaking skills at Nurul Jadid High School, it has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations may affect the generalization of findings and interpretation of research results.

One of the main limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size, consisting of only five students. This sample size may not be representative enough to reflect the entire student population at Nurul Jadid High School or other Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. This may limit the ability to generalize the research findings to the broader experience of EFL students in Islamic boarding schools.

This study is also limited to one location, namely Nurul Jadid High School. The specific educational context in this Islamic boarding school may differ significantly from other Islamic boarding schools or institutions in terms of teaching approaches, learning environments, and culture. As a result, the research results cannot be easily applied in other contexts without considering these differences.

The data collection methods used in this study, including semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, may contain subjective biases. For example, interviews may be influenced by how questions are asked and participants' interpretations of those questions. In addition, questionnaire data may not cover all dimensions relevant to students' learning experiences, thereby reducing the depth of analysis.

This study did not consider other variables that may influence students' speaking skills, such as demographic factors (age, educational background, etc.), previous experience in learning English, or external influences such as the home environment. These variables may have a significant impact on students' speaking abilities, but they were not analyzed in depth in this study.

Given these limitations, it is important to conduct further research with a larger and more diverse sample, as well as in various educational contexts, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by EFL students in Islamic boarding schools. Research that considers additional variables and uses more diverse data collection methods is also highly recommended to complement the results obtained from this study.

Novelty/Contribution

Previous studies have examined English speaking difficulties among EFL learners from psychological, instructional, or sociocultural perspectives (Bakhtiar & Suwandi, 2022;

Souzandehfar & Ibrahim, 2023; Timur et al., 2024). However, limited research has integrated these perspectives within the context of Islamic boarding schools. This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it integrates Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to explain how psychological and environmental factors jointly influence students' English speaking performance. Second, it employs a mixed-method sequential explanatory design by combining classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and Likert-scale questionnaires, providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' speaking challenges through methodological triangulation (Aramide et al., 2023; Lorenzini et al., 2024). Third, it offers context-specific pedagogical recommendations for Islamic boarding schools, including the development of communicative learning environments, structured conversation clubs, collaborative speaking activities, and supportive teacher feedback. These contributions enrich the understanding of EFL speaking development and provide practical guidance for improving English language teaching in Islamic boarding school settings.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study investigated the challenges encountered by EFL students in developing English speaking skills in the Outstanding Social Sciences Program of SMA Nurul Jadid, an Islamic boarding school in East Java. The findings reveal that students' speaking difficulties are multidimensional and result from the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental factors.

The study identified speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes as the primary internal barriers that reduce students' willingness to communicate in English. Although many students possess basic grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, these psychological barriers often prevent them from expressing their ideas confidently during classroom speaking activities.

The findings also demonstrate that external environmental factors significantly influence students' speaking development. Teacher-centred instructional practices, limited opportunities for authentic English communication, insufficient constructive feedback from teachers, and restricted peer interaction collectively hinder students from developing communicative competence. Consequently, students have limited opportunities to practice English meaningfully both inside and outside the classroom.

By integrating classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire data, this study confirms that English speaking proficiency is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by supportive psychological conditions and communicative learning environments. These findings support Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, highlighting that reducing speaking anxiety while increasing meaningful social interaction can strengthen students' willingness to communicate and improve their speaking performance.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the interaction between psychological and environmental factors influencing English speaking skills within the unique context of an Islamic boarding school. The findings emphasize that improving students' speaking competence requires the integration of communicative teaching practices with supportive learning environments that encourage confidence, participation, and authentic English communication.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. First, English teachers are encouraged to implement more communicative and student-centred instructional strategies, such as role-playing, pair and group discussions, problem-based speaking activities, and structured conversation practice, to increase students' opportunities for authentic oral communication. Teachers should also provide constructive and encouraging feedback that focuses on building students' confidence while gradually improving their linguistic accuracy.

Second, school administrators are encouraged to strengthen the English-speaking environment by establishing conversation clubs, English Day programmes, peer mentoring, and extracurricular activities that provide regular opportunities for students to use English in meaningful contexts beyond the classroom. Such initiatives may help reduce speaking anxiety while fostering students' willingness to communicate.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to investigate English speaking challenges using larger and more diverse samples from different Islamic boarding schools or other EFL contexts. Further studies may also examine additional variables, such as Willingness to Communicate (WTC), digital learning technologies, speaking motivation, or longitudinal changes in speaking proficiency to provide a broader understanding of English speaking development among EFL learners.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

This research was conducted collaboratively by both authors, who contributed to the study from its conception to the completion of the manuscript. **Intan Cahyani** was primarily responsible for conceptualizing the study, developing the research design and instruments (observation checklist, interview guide, and Likert-scale questionnaire), collecting data through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire administration at SMA Nurul Jadid, conducting the data analysis, and preparing the initial manuscript draft. **Mochlis Ekowijayanto** contributed to the refinement of the research design, supervised the research process, validated the data analysis and interpretation, critically reviewed the manuscript, and provided substantial revisions to improve its academic quality. Both authors contributed to the interpretation of the findings, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the research.

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