



## TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS HIGH SCHOOL GENZ STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

by

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### Abstract:

Teaching English-speaking skills requires the right effort so that students can play an active role in the learning process. Therefore, this study aims to identify the techniques used by teachers in teaching English speaking skills, the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English Speaking Skills, and the coping strategies employed to address the difficulties encountered by teachers. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to present data. The participants in this study were three teachers from a vocational high school in Sukoharjo who taught at different grade levels. Data were collected from observations of teaching and learning activities in the classroom and interviews with the three related teachers. After the data is collected, it will be analyzed by first simplifying the findings, grouping them, and concluding in the final stage. The results of the study showed that (1) Role-play, discussion, and presentation techniques are very effective in English language learning, (2) the challenges faced by teachers are students' lack of self-confidence, different student input, and differences in student interests, (3) the strategies used to deal with problems are forming small groups, level-based tasks, and linking speaking to interests. The results of this study aim to provide additional insights for teachers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the learning process.

**Keywords:** English; challenges; coping strategies; speaking-skills; teaching

### Abstrak:

Mengajarkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris memerlukan upaya yang tepat agar siswa dapat berperan aktif selama proses pembelajaran. Maka dari itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi teknik yang digunakan guru dalam mengajarkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris, tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam mengajarkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris, dan strategi mengatasi tantangan yang dihadapi guru. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menyajikan data. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah tiga guru dari salah satu sekolah menengah kejuruan di Sukoharjo dan mengajar di tingkat kelas yang berbeda. data dikoleksi dari observasi kegiatan belajar mengajar di kelas dan juga melalui wawancara ketiga guru yang berkaitan. Setelah data ditemukan, data akan dianalisis dengan cara mengumpulkan terlebih dahulu, kemudian menyederhanakan temuan, dilanjutkan dengan pengelompokan, dan pada tahap terakhir menyimpulkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) teknik Roleplay, diskusi, dan presentasi sangat efektif digunakan dalam pembelajaran bahasa

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*Inggris, (2) tantangan yang dihadapi guru yaitu kurangnya rasa percaya diri siswa, perbedaan input siswa, dan perbedaan minat siswa, (3) untuk strategi yang dilakukan dalam menghadapi masalah yaitu membentuk kelompok kecil, memberikan tugas berdasarkan tingkat pengetahuan, dan menghubungkan keahlian berbicara dengan minat siswa. Hasil penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan tambahan bagi guru agar proses pembelajaran menjadi lebih efektif.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Inggris; Tantangan; strategi penanggulangan; keterampilan berbicara; pengajaran*

## INTRODUCTION

English is an international language. English has a profound influence on various aspects of life, including culture, society, politics, and ethics (Dutta, 2020). In addition, English has become the key to education, the office, law, business, and many other fields. English is essential in the current era because it is closely related to Many Aspects of Life. In Indonesia, English is also used in everyday conversations. One of the primary functions of the English language is to facilitate communication. Speaking, writing, reading, and listening are the four components of English proficiency. English language proficiency, mainly speaking proficiency, is becoming increasingly crucial for Indonesian Vocational High School (SMK) graduates in an increasingly competitive globalized world. These abilities boost their competitiveness in the global labor market and enable them to communicate successfully at work (Lauder, 2008). Although English is essential, he emphasized that teaching speaking skills in vocational schools presents its challenges, as the primary focus of vocational education prioritizes the development of specific technical skills over language skills.

Curriculum is an essential component of education. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide students with freedom and independence while emphasizing the development of 21st-century skills (Lubis et al., 2023). The teaching methodology in Indonesia underwent substantial modifications in 2002 with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, which was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The curriculum focuses on forming a Pancasila student profile to strengthen students' character and skills (Riyan et al., 2022). This curriculum emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills and student-centered learning more than it focuses on the implementation of learning. In teaching English, particularly in developing speaking skills, the Independent Curriculum offers teachers the opportunity to create more innovative and effective teaching strategies. "Inactive methods developed based on constructivism

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theories, the student plays the role of the constructor of information and takes an active role (Piaget, 1968; Vygotsky, 1978; Erbil, 2020, p. 1).

The book (Biesta, 2023) defines teaching as the process of instructing students in a classroom setting, which involves guiding their studies and imparting knowledge to them. (Brown, 1994) confirms, "Teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learners to learn, and setting the condition of learning." This definition emphasizes that teachers' roles are more than just delivering material. They are also responsible for creating a conducive learning environment, providing guidance, and helping students understand and apply the knowledge they have acquired. Teachers must create a comfortable and pleasant classroom atmosphere so that students can study in a relaxed and conducive environment. Each teacher has their way of teaching English using various approaches and methods. There are also many ways to teach speaking skills. They are starting with songs, videos, games, and so on. (Endang Fauziati, 2017) The techniques for teaching English speaking skills are role-playing, games, problem-solving songs, and discussion. According to Harmer (2022), there are six techniques for teaching English Speaking skills: acting from a script, communication games, discussion, prepared talks, questionnaires, and simulation and role-play.

The study by Henisah et al. (2023) and Kasper and Youn (2017) found that this role-play technique is very effective in learning English because it can improve students' communication skills. Also, students play a more active role in the learning process. In research (Cayabyab et al., 2023; Hayati, 2021; Kenali et al., 2019; Nuraini et al., 2023), game techniques can be used interactively to train students, enhancing their independent learning and language practice by improving confidence, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension. The study (Destari et al., 2023) found role-plays that effectively teach English-speaking skills, small-group discussion techniques, and debates. According to Yusuf et al. (2024), Implementing group discussion can improve communication between introverted and extroverted students. Additionally, there is a presentation technique that can help students hone their speaking skills and practice their communication skills (Febriansyah et al., 2023). The study (Maca, 2020) found that analyzing the efficacy of strategies such as pair and group interviews, which enhance participants' confidence, fluency, and active involvement

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compared to conventional methods, is part of the discussion in teaching English-speaking skills.

However, implementing speaking skills teaching strategies that align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools is still a challenge for many teachers. According to Kumari and Rahman (2024), many students struggle with shyness and nervousness, which makes it challenging for them to participate in speaking activities. Additionally, personalized education and feedback become complicated in large and diverse classes, making it challenging to meet the individual needs of each student. Further research conducted by Rezeki and Dalimunte (2024) found that teachers often struggle to help students communicate successfully due to their limited grammar and vocabulary skills. Also, a lack of facilities and teaching materials further exacerbates teachers' challenges.

Thus, the lack of student motivation and self-confidence in learning English is still a significant problem in teaching English. Research by Huang (2020), Kurniarini (2023), Li and Heydarnejad (2024), and Omar et al. (2020) also revealed that one of the challenges teachers face in teaching students speaking skills is the students' lack of self-confidence. This was stated by Rezeki and Dalimunte (2024), who found that a lack of student motivation can create significant obstacles for teachers in promoting effective speaking, as psychological factors affect the quality and development of students' language production. Not only did the lack of student motivation occur, but it also led to challenges in school facilities, increased student anxiety, and difficulties for teachers in the curriculum (Kristina et al., 2021; Purwati et al., 2023; Tsuraya, 2020). They also revealed that teachers face challenges due to a lack of motivation and confidence.

There are always challenges in the learning process, and each teacher has their approach to addressing these challenges. The same is true in previous research, which Radulović et al. (2023) explained, stating that when tasks are adjusted to students' abilities, it improves academic achievement and increases student engagement. This is one of the strategies teachers use to address problems in the learning process. In the study (He et al., 2024). It was also found that teachers can capitalize on students' interests by working on speaking assignments that use topics and contexts relevant to students, which can increase engagement and effectiveness in speaking activities.

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Based on the study's background, the researcher aims to provide an in-depth examination of the techniques, challenges, and coping strategies involved in teaching English speaking skills at high school, particularly in vocational high schools. Previous studies have primarily focused on techniques and challenges. However, they have rarely explored how teachers cope with strategies. Furthermore, with the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, this study will become more relevant in revealing the dynamics of English learning. Thus, the research problems have been formulated as:

1. What techniques do teachers use in teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational High School in Sukoharjo?
2. What challenges do teachers face in teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational High School in Sukoharjo?
3. How do teachers use coping strategies in facing the challenges of teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational High School in Sukoharjo?

## METHOD

### *Design*

This research method employs a descriptive qualitative design within the phenomenological procedure to explore teaching techniques for English-speaking skills, focusing on techniques, challenges faced, and coping strategies. This phenomenological approach emphasizes gathering insights from participants' opinions and experiences, ensuring the findings are grounded in real-world contexts (Miksza et al., 2023). The scope of this study encompasses the experiences and perceptions of English teachers regarding the teaching of speaking skills in vocational high schools.

### *Participant*

The study participants consisted of three English teachers (all female) from vocational high schools in Sukoharjo, in grades X, XI, and XII, who implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The participants had teaching experience ranging from 2 to 10 years. They were selected using a convenience sampling technique. The subjects were chosen because vocational high school teachers have a strategic role in preparing students' English

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competencies for the world of work. Based on the Merdeka Curriculum in the vocational high school, the study focused on teaching techniques, challenges, and coping strategies in teaching English speaking skills.

***Instrument***

According to Lexy et al. (2017), the primary data sources in qualitative research are words and actions; the rest are additional data, such as documents and others. The instruments used in this study include observation followed by interviews to collect data on the subject. The first non-participant structured observation was conducted in the classroom, focusing on teaching techniques, student-teacher interactions, and speaking activities. The observation utilized a field note to document the teaching and learning process. Following the observations, the researcher conducted interviews using a semi-structured format, with five questions focused on the techniques, challenges, and coping strategies employed by teachers in teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum. The reliability and validity of the interviews were established through triangulation. The researcher asked each teacher five questions during the interview process to facilitate data collection.

***Data collecting technique***

This study employs two primary data collection techniques: observation and interviews. This observation aims to determine directly what techniques are used to teach English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum. Using the observational method, researchers can gain an overview of the learning process, student behavior, natural phenomena, problems, and how to address them. This observation generates context data in the form of descriptive field notes, documenting teaching techniques, classroom interactions, and the implementation of speaking activities. After conducting observations, researchers conduct interviews. This type of interview aims to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' views, experiences, and opinions on a particular topic or issue. The interviews also generate content data, including teachers' narrative descriptions of their techniques, challenges, and strategies. In this study, the researcher asked English teachers at vocational high schools in Sukoharjo about the techniques they use in teaching English speaking skills based on the

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Merdeka Curriculum, as well as the challenges and coping strategies they face in teaching English speaking skills.

***Data analysis technique***

In this study, the researcher employed the data analysis technique described by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of four sequential streams of activities: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion and verification. More specifics about these four flows are as follows: (1) Data Collection. To obtain research data, researchers conducted observations and interviews. This observation was conducted in the classroom, with the researcher serving as a teacher of teaching and learning activities. What the researcher saw the researcher will write in the form of a note field. After conducting observations, the researcher will interview the teacher regarding the questions prepared, which relate to the observation activities in the classroom and the research questions. (2). Data Reduction. At this stage, the researcher will process the raw data collected from observations and interviews to summarize and systematize it, making it easier for readers to understand and observe.

For observational data, the researcher coded field notes to identify patterns in teaching techniques, classroom management, and student engagement. For interview data, the researcher performed thematic coding to identify recurring themes related to techniques, challenges, and coping strategies. Researchers sorted the data obtained according to the problem statement, eliminating irrelevant information while preserving the essence of participants' experiences. (3) Display Data. At this stage, researchers present data by grouping observations and interviews, providing brief descriptions and narrative summaries to support their findings.

The observation findings were organized into categories based on the techniques observed. In contrast, interview data were organized according to emerging themes across participants' responses, creating a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study. (4) Drawing Conclusion or Proof. If the compression and data presentation stage has been completed, the last stage is to conclude. At this stage, after presenting data correlated to the techniques, challenges, and coping strategies in English speaking skills teaching strategies based on the Merdeka Curriculum at a vocational high school in Sukoharjo, the researcher

concluded by synthesizing patterns across both observation and interview data. The researcher verified these conclusions by checking for consistency between observed practices and teachers' reported experiences, ensuring the findings accurately represented the studied phenomenon.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

*The study seeks to answer the following questions;*

***What techniques do teachers use in teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational High School in Sukoharjo?***

Based on the interviews and observations of the three teachers, it is known that each teacher uses various techniques to teach English speaking skills. Although we use the Independent Curriculum, the implementation of teaching strategies adapts to each teacher's style and experience. This research found that teachers employ three primary techniques to enhance students' speaking skills: role-playing, discussion, and presentations (see Table 1).

***Table 1. Teaching techniques for English speaking skills (n= 3)***

<i>No</i>	<i>Teaching Techniques</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1.	<i>Role-play</i>	<i>Teacher A, teacher C</i>	<i>Encourage students to actively use English and apply it in real life.</i>
2.	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C</i>	<i>Students are more actively involved in the learning process and can develop critical thinking skills.</i>
3.	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Teacher B</i>	<i>Can build confidence in public speaking and improve language structuring skills.</i>

Table 1 above shows that role-play is used by Teachers A and C because this technique allows students to engage in conversations in real-life situations, which is highly relevant for vocational high school students. All teachers use discussion because this method encourages active interaction and critical thinking. Meanwhile, presentation is used more by Teacher B to increase students' confidence in public speaking.

***What challenges do teachers face in teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational High School in Sukoharjo?***

Every teacher faces challenges in teaching students to develop their speaking skills. This research found that these challenges stem from students' lack of self-confidence, varying student input, and differences in student interests.

**Table 2. Challenges in teaching English speaking skills (n= 3)**

<i>No</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Description</i>
1.	<i>Lack of self-confidence</i>	<i>Teacher A</i>	<i>Students are afraid of mispronouncing words and are concerned about being teased by their friends.</i>
2.	<i>Differences in student input</i>	<i>Teacher B</i>	<i>Different levels of students' English proficiency.</i>
3.	<i>Differences in student interest</i>	<i>Teacher B, Teacher C</i>	<i>Some students prefer writing over speaking.</i>

The biggest challenge faced by teacher A is a lack of student confidence. Many students are afraid to speak because they worry about mispronouncing words and being teased by their friends. Additionally, the difference in ability levels within one class poses a challenge for Teacher B, as there are students who are already fluent in English while others continue to struggle. Teachers B and C also face differences in student interests, where some students prefer writing to speaking, making it challenging to encourage them to participate actively in speaking activities.

***How do teachers use coping strategies in facing the challenges of teaching English speaking skills based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational High School in Sukoharjo?***

In facing these challenges, the three teachers developed adaptive strategies appropriate to the class conditions and students' needs. The strategies that teachers employ to address challenges include forming small groups, assigning level-based tasks, and connecting with and speaking to students' interests.

**Table 3. Coping strategies for teaching challenges (n= 3)**

<i>No</i>	<i>Coping strategies</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Purposes</i>
1.	<i>Forming small group</i>	<i>Teacher A</i>	<i>Increase self-confidence through peers.</i>
2.	<i>Level-based tasks</i>	<i>Teacher B</i>	<i>Adjusts difficulty levels to match student proficiency.</i>
3.	<i>Linking speaking to interests</i>	<i>Teacher B, Teacher C</i>	<i>Encourages speaking through student-preferred activities.</i>

To address students' lack of confidence, Teacher A formed small groups where students with higher abilities helped their less confident friends. Meanwhile, Teacher B used level-based tasks, adjusting the difficulty level of the tasks to each student's ability so that they feel burned. Teachers B and C also linked speaking activities to students' interests to motivate them, for example, by allowing students who enjoyed writing to read their work aloud in front of the class as a form of speaking practice.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal important insights into the teaching techniques, challenges, and coping strategies employed by vocational high school teachers in implementing English speaking skills instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum.

**Teaching techniques used by teachers to improve student speaking skills**

The study results revealed that teachers use three main techniques in teaching students' speaking skills: role-play, discussion, and presentation. Each technique has different characteristics and objectives. This study found that role-play is the most effective technique in improving students' speaking skills in vocational schools. This technique enables students to practice in real-world contexts, thereby increasing their confidence in using the English language. Additionally, students can play roles directly and apply English conversations to everyday life. Teacher A emphasized that this technique is particularly suitable for vocational school students, as they will need to utilize speaking skills in everyday life and the workplace later. As stated by teacher A:

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*"It also happens that it is very effective to be applied to the students here. I have tried other techniques before, but they were not as successful as this role-play. Furthermore, it happens that this is a vocational high school, so this role-play technique is very suitable to be used because, with this technique, students are required to be able to apply a conversation to everyday life directly." (Teacher A)*

This finding is supported by Harmer (2022) and Endang Fauziati (2017), who have proven that it is effective in creating a safe and structured learning environment. Additionally, the study by Destari et al. (2023) revealed that the role-play technique has proven effective in English language learning. This finding was also reported in the study by Henisah et al. (2023), which explained that this role-play technique can enhance students' communication skills and participation in teaching and learning. The application of role-play in vocational high school settings is particularly relevant as it directly prepares students for workplace communication scenarios they will encounter after graduation.

However, although this technique is effective, some teachers also rely on discussion methods to encourage active student participation in class. All teachers use this technique. This technique can help develop students' critical thinking and argumentation skills, encouraging them to be more actively engaged in the learning process. Discussions enable students to exchange ideas, hear other perspectives, and develop the ability to construct and articulate arguments. Teacher B emphasized making students more active and directly involved in learning:

*"With discussions, I think it makes students more active and directly involved in the learning process." (Teacher B)*

Teacher C added that discussions train students in critical thinking and understanding different perspectives:

*"The discussion aims to develop students' critical thinking skills. By this technique, students can exchange opinions, listen to other people's perspectives, and learn to convey their arguments." (Teacher C)*

Teacher B emphasized that discussions allow students to participate more actively in class. This is also related to research conducted by Destari et al. (2023), which revealed that the study applied this approach to improve students' speaking skills, enabling them to become active and think critically in their learning. According to Fauziati (2017) and Harmer (2018), discussion techniques can create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment where learners can actively engage in meaningful dialogue, build their confidence through peer

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support, and develop their speaking and critical thinking skills concurrently. However, not all teachers consider this technique to be equally effective. Teacher A, for example, feels that discussion is less effective than role-play because students tend to be shy and rely more on the more active students.

While discussion provides opportunities for interactive learning and critical thinking, some students may still struggle with building confidence and articulating their thoughts in a structured manner. To address this, teachers also implement presentation techniques, which offer a structured platform for students to develop their ability to articulate ideas clearly, construct logical arguments, and speak with confidence in front of an audience. Unlike role-play and discussion, which emphasize spontaneous interaction, presentations encourage students to prepare and deliver their speech in a more formal setting, helping them refine language use and public speaking skills. The presentation also plays a crucial role in helping students construct logical arguments, use appropriate language, and speak confidently in front of the class. Teacher B uses this technique to train students in formal communication situations and improve their vocabulary. As stated by teacher B:

*"Meanwhile, presentations train them to speak in public with confidence, as well as enriching their vocabulary and ability to construct good sentences."(Teacher B)*

Harmer's (2022) research supports this finding, showing that students who are accustomed to giving presentations experience improvements in organizing their thoughts and speaking more confidently. The presentation approach also aligns with Febriansyah et al. (2023), who found that presentations help students hone their speaking skills and practice communication in a structured format. Therefore, presentations not only help students take ideas in a more structured way but also train them to use suitable language and speak confidently in public. This technique offers students the opportunity to develop their speaking skills in formal settings.

Thus, each technique plays a crucial role in enhancing students' speaking skills. Role-play helps students build courage and practice in real-life situations. Discussions encourage interaction and critical thinking, while presentations train students to construct coherent arguments and convey their ideas effectively. Teachers select and combine these techniques

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according to students' needs, enabling them to develop their speaking skills optimally in various contexts.

***Challenges faced by teachers in teaching speaking skills***

This study identified three significant challenges that teachers face: a lack of self-confidence, diverse student input, and variations in student interest. One of the biggest challenges in teaching speaking skills is a lack of self-confidence. Students are afraid of making pronunciation mistakes or being criticized by peers. Internal factors such as a less supportive learning environment contribute to this challenge. Teacher A confirmed that many of the students experience fear when speaking English:

*"Many students feel less confident in speaking English." (Teacher A)*

*"Many factors. For example, they worry about mispronunciation or are afraid of being underestimated by their friends. A less supportive learning environment can also be a barrier." (Teacher A)*

Teacher A emphasized that self-confidence is a significant obstacle in teaching speaking. This indicates that even though students possess adequate linguistic abilities, anxiety and a fear of being evaluated negatively can impede their participation in speaking. Research conducted by Shodmonov (2024) also highlighted anxiety as a significant challenge in teaching speaking skills, reinforcing the view that students' fear of failure and negative criticism can hinder their participation in speaking activities. However, this study extends these findings by showing that a less supportive learning environment is also a factor that exacerbates students' anxiety in speaking. The research by Tsuraya (2020) and Purwanti and Wardani (2024) also found that the main problem faced by most students in pronunciation is a lack of self-confidence, often caused by a lack of practice. These findings suggest that psychological barriers play a crucial role in the development of speaking skills and require targeted interferences. Thus, a lack of self-confidence becomes a main fence for students in developing their speaking skills.

In addition to psychological factors such as self-confidence, challenges in teaching speaking skills also arise from differences in students' ability levels within a single class. Differences in student input present another considerable challenge. The diversity of students' background knowledge and readiness are factors that cause differences in student input. It

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results in unequal opportunities for authentic practice, with less experienced students being more reluctant to participate. As teacher B explained:

*"What is certain is that students' input is different; that is one thing. Then, different interests should be differentiated, as not all individuals are interested in speaking. Some prefer to be silent, but they also prefer to write." (Teacher B)*

While Shodmonov (2024) did not specifically address input differences, the research did identify limited authentic practice opportunities as a challenge, which relates to the varying readiness levels observed in this study. The heterogeneity of student backgrounds in vocational high schools appears to be a particular challenge that requires adaptive teaching strategies. The differences in students' ability levels necessitate a flexible teaching approach that provides all students with an equal opportunity to develop. However, the challenges do not stop here, as teachers must also deal with differences in students' interests in speaking skills.

Apart from differences in student input, differences in student interest constituted the third major challenge, which is an obstacle to teaching. The Merdeka Curriculum provides freedom to explore, but this can also limit students' motivation to practice speaking. Not all students are interested in speaking skills. Some of them prefer writing skills or other activities. Teacher B stated that not all students are interested in speaking English.

*"not all of them are interested in speaking. Some prefer to be silent but prefer to write." (Teacher B).*

According to research conducted by Shodmonov (2024), this can be described as a situation where students do not see the value in speaking or prefer other language skills, resulting in a decrease in their motivation to speak. Teachers must align language activities with students' interests or provide alternative ways to encourage speaking engagement according to their preferences. The study by Tsuraya (2020) and Rezeki and Dalimunte (2024) also found that one of the challenges teachers face in teaching English speaking skills is a lack of motivation, which stems from the students themselves. These findings suggest that balancing curricular freedom with skill development requirements presents a persistent challenge for teachers. Thus, the differences in students' interests in speaking English present challenges that require more flexible and interest-based learning strategies. Therefore, to

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address these challenges, teachers have developed adaptive strategies that allow them to adjust their teaching techniques to students' needs.

These three challenges are, therefore, interrelated and reflect the complexity of teaching speaking skills in a diverse classroom. A lack of confidence makes some students reluctant to speak, while differences in student input lead to gaps in participation. Coupled with differences in student interests, teachers must find ways to adapt teaching strategies so that all students have an equal opportunity to thrive. To address this, teachers employ adaptive strategies that enable them to adjust their teaching methods to meet the individual needs of their students.

***Coping strategies used by teachers in facing the challenges***

To address the challenges they faced in their classrooms, the three teachers employed adaptive strategies tailored to their students' individual needs and learning conditions. These strategies include forming small groups, using level-based tasks, and linking speaking to students' interests. One practical approach is forming small groups. By forming small groups in the classroom, students can help each other. The first thing the teacher does is record the superior students in the class, after which they are divided into small groups. In one group, there is one mentor, who is also a friend of the students and has superior academic grades. The application of forming small groups is carried out by teacher A. Proven by teacher A's statement:

*"The solution is that I form them into small groups. Later, each group will have a leader, and I choose the leader. Why is that? Because the leader here is the student with the highest English score. I collect the data first, typically from the previous class teacher. Later, the leader will help his/her friends who are struggling with English. In addition, I try to provide support and motivation to the students so that they remain enthusiastic." (Teacher A)*

This strategy aligns with Destari et al. (2023), who found that small-group discussions encourage students to be more active in interacting with one another. Additionally, small group discussions can also enhance students' speaking skills, enabling them to become more active and think critically in their learning process. By implementing small groups, students get more opportunities to speak in a more comfortable atmosphere and build confidence. However, while peer support is helpful, it does not completely overcome differences in

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student proficiency levels. To ensure that each student progresses at their own pace, teachers also implement tasks based on levels that are appropriate to each student's abilities.

Another strategy implemented is level-based tasks. Level-based tasks are a strategy that assigns students tasks according to their ability levels. It can make students feel comfortable, allowing them to develop their English skills at a pace that suits their level. Teacher B adjusts assignments based on each student's abilities to ensure that they can develop optimally.

*"To deal with the differences in students' abilities, I usually give assignments that are appropriate to their level. Students with low-level knowledge are usually given basic exercises. For those who are more advanced, I give more challenging assignments. In this way, students can learn at a rhythm that suits their abilities." (Teacher B)*

*"Yes. That way, the learning process becomes more comfortable, and they can develop their English skills slowly." (Teacher B)*

Teacher B states that by giving more manageable tasks to beginner students and additional challenges to more advanced students, each student can develop comfortably without feeling overwhelmed or bored. This is related to research (Radulović et al., 2023), which shows that when tasks are matched to students' abilities, academic achievement improves and student engagement increases. This approach ensures that each student is appropriately challenged, not overwhelmed or under-stimulated, which is essential for optimal learning. Additionally, providing tasks according to students' ability levels is highly effective in improving learning outcomes. However, in addition to adjusting the level of difficulty of the assignment, teachers also need to consider students' interests so that they are more motivated to speak English. Motivation also plays a crucial role in the success of English learning. Hence, teachers need to consider students' interests to enhance their engagement in speaking. In this way, it not only improves students' speaking skills but also helps them feel more confident in their communication.

Another strategy implemented by teachers is linking speaking to interest. It links speaking activities to students' interests, such as encouraging writing-focused students to present their work aloud, allowing them to explore while subtly improving their speaking skills. Teacher C allows students to explore learning methods that best suit their learning styles, such as having students who prefer writing present their writing as a speaking practice.

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It relates to the research by scholars (He et al., 2024). Teachers can leverage students' interests into speaking tasks by using relevant topics and contexts that resonate with them, thus increasing engagement and effectiveness in speaking activities. Similarly, Teacher C emphasized student autonomy by allowing them to choose their learning strategies without pressure to excel in specific skills. Teacher C believed in identifying and supporting the learning styles that best fit their students while implementing varied assessments. Teachers B and C prioritized flexibility and personalized learning to ensure student engagement and comfort. Collectively, these strategies underscore the importance of adaptive teaching methods in addressing diverse classroom challenges, promoting skill development, and cultivating a positive learning environment.

These three strategies work synergistically to create a supportive learning environment. Small-group formatting helps students overcome anxiety and increase their participation. Level-based tasks ensure that all students receive appropriate challenges, and linking speaking to their interests increases their motivation to engage in speaking. By combining these three approaches, teachers can overcome the challenges in teaching speaking skills and effectively implement the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum in Vocational High School.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

### *Conclusion*

Three key conclusions from this study highlight the techniques, challenges, and coping strategies that teachers face in teaching English speaking skills. First, techniques that have proven effective for teachers in vocational high schools are role-play, discussion, and presentation. Second, teachers' challenges in teaching English-speaking skills include a lack of student confidence, differences in student input, and variations in student interests. Lastly, one found in this study is coping strategies used by teachers in facing these challenges. In facing these challenges, each teacher has their approach, such as forming small groups, using level-based tasks, and linking speaking to students' interests. This study concludes that teachers need to master more than one learning technique, and they must also understand their students individually; this is expected so that learning objectives can be achieved. Suggestions

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for further research include expanding the sample scope by involving more vocational high schools from various regions. It will provide a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of speaking skills teaching techniques in the Merdeka Curriculum.

***Limitation***

This study only focused on one vocational high school in Sukoharjo, which may not fully represent the diversity of teaching challenges and practices in other educational areas or settings. Furthermore, the qualitative approach provided valuable insights but lacked quantitative data to support broader generalizations. Expanding the scope and incorporating mixed methodologies in future research could provide a more holistic understanding of the issues and solutions associated with teaching speaking skills.

***Implication***

Teachers are expected to create a more exciting learning environment when teaching English-speaking skills by recognizing each student's needs to achieve learning goals. In addition, teachers must master multiple learning techniques, not just one, but several. Thus, learning will not be monotonous. Teacher collaboration is also necessary to gather input on weaknesses and strengths during the teaching and learning process.

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