# IDEAS

Issued by English study program of IAIN Palopo

# Exploring Boarding School EFL Teachers' Strategies to Build Up Students' Speaking Competence

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## Abstract

This study investigates how EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers utilize teaching strategies to enhance students' speaking competence, particularly in Grade 8 classes. The data were collected through 30-minute observations per teacher and 15-minute semi-structured interviews with both teachers from the boarding school, conducted both inside and outside the classroom. This study employed a descriptive case study approach, and the data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis to identify recurring patterns and categorize the strategies used in the classroom. The findings revealed that teachers employed a combination of strategies both inside and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, strategies include vocabulary drilling, question-and-answer sessions, discussions, and group work. Meanwhile, the teachers from outside the classroom employed a range of teaching strategies, including group work, vocabulary drilling and memorization, as well as question-and-answer sessions and conversations. The above strategies demonstrate that interaction strategies, such as dialogue, conversation, and Q&A, encourage the use of speaking language, while vocabulary drilling provides the foundation for speaking development. The results offer insight into how boarding schools can promote lifelong language learning by striking a balance between classroom instruction and additional practice. The study highlights the practical value of interactive strategies in fostering speaking competence. However, as the research was limited to two teachers in a single institution, the findings provide transferable insights for similar EFL boarding school settings, particularly in highlighting the practical value of interactive approaches for fostering speaking competence.

**Keywords**: *boarding school, case study, communicative language teaching, qualitative research, speaking competence, teaching strategies*

**Introduction**

English has emerged as the universal language, enabling people from around the world to communicate with one another (Akhter, 2021). It has become a global language that plays a central role in international communication, education, and professional development. The four basic competencies of speaking, listening, reading, and writing are essential for acquiring the English language. One of the competencies, speaking, is regarded as an essential competency among people in a globalized world who need to communicate effectively. This makes it a necessary component of learning a second language, as it enables students to communicate actively in the language using authentic contexts. Additionally, speaking is the competence of people to speak fluently and convey their thoughts and feelings to others. This competence is not only due to a knowledge of language features, but also the competence to process language and information (Harmer, 2015). The teacher's role becomes very significant, providing learning experiences that encourage students to communicate, engage, and gain confidence, while also serving as language input instructors.

Despite the importance, many Indonesian EFL learners continue to struggle with speaking due to limited exposure, low confidence, and a lack of opportunities to practice. To address these challenges, teachers can employ various strategies to promote active teaching and learning, particularly in developing speaking competence, such as discussions, prepared talks and presentations, questionnaires, simulations, role-plays, and storytelling. These strategies align with the importance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as it emphasizes authentic communication and interactive tasks, encouraging learners to use the language in real social situations that increase the chances of authentic conversation in EFL classes (Harmer, 2015). CLT is particularly important in the Indonesian context, as it emphasizes student-centered classroom activities, fluency, and authentic communication.

This presents valuable opportunities to integrate inside and outside the classroom with regular communication practices in boarding schools, where students live and learn together. Although there is less empirical research examining how teachers apply Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strategies to develop speaking competence in such settings, this special setting may provide students with more consistent exposure to English than traditional schools.

Numerous previous studies have been conducted on teaching speaking strategies. The study by Wahidiyati et al. (2024) researched English teachers at the junior high school level. Their teaching strategies included describing pictures, conducting interviews, facilitating discussions, engaging in Roleplay, providing stimulation, and brainstorming. Another study was conducted by Mislina (2023), who used elementary English teachers as respondents. Many strategies are used by teachers when teaching speaking to young learners, including discussion, games, describing pictures, and Role-playing. In addition, Hanif (2023) researched high

school settings where the teacher conducted a drilling and shadowing activity, followed by role-playing among the students in the class.

Although these findings are present, in-depth research is still lacking, particularly in teaching speaking strategies within boarding school settings. Previous studies have primarily focused on general schools, particularly in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. General schools, also known as *Sekolah Umum* in Indonesia, are traditional day schools where students attend classes during the day and then return home at the end of the day. This school follows the national curriculum of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Winurini, 2019). In contrast, boarding schools, also known as *Sekolah Asrama*, present a comprehensive educational setting where students live on campus. Both schools include English teaching, which is taught at Indonesian general and boarding schools as part of the National Curriculum. However, the Time and level of language exposure depend on the school, whereas English teaching in general schools usually follows a schedule with a particular number of weekly class hours. Also, offer more opportunities for language exposure and incorporate language use in both classes throughout the day.

The purpose of this research is to investigate teaching strategies, particularly in boarding schools, as a potential solution to developing speaking competence among students. The study aims to determine how teaching strategies can build speaking competence in boarding school settings, providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of teaching strategies that foster a more supportive and engaging environment. This research's findings are expected to benefit teachers by offering a structured approach that promotes active participation. This research further contributes to the existing body of knowledge by filling the gap in the literature on practical teaching for improving speaking competence in EFL contexts. As a result, the researcher conducted the following research questions: (1) What teaching strategies are used by EFL teachers in a boarding school to build students' speaking competence? (2) How are these teaching strategies implemented by the teachers in the classroom context of a boarding school?

**Method**

**Research Design**

The researchers conducted this research by using a qualitative, descriptive case study approach. Qualitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing data to obtain insight into or knowledge of the phenomenon under study. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to investigate a social phenomenon in detail, providing detailed information. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to investigate a social phenomenon in depth, thereby providing detailed information (Creswell, 2013). In addition, Yin (2009) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context. In case study research, multiple methods of data collection are employed, as it involves an

in-depth examination of a phenomenon.

This study describes the phenomenon of English foreign language teaching strategies employed by teachers in boarding schools, allowing for an in-depth exploration of these strategies within a real-life classroom context. Since this research aims to describe how teacher builds students' speaking competence, the case study is suitable for providing rich, detailed descriptions to understand a particular social phenomenon. The scope of this study is limited to describing teaching strategies as they occurred in the boarding school context. It does not include numerical data or experimental testing of the strategies' effectiveness, and therefore, the findings should be interpreted through narrative and description.

**Research Settings**

This research was conducted in February 2025 at Nurul Ulum boarding schools in Aceh, Indonesia. There are two types of classrooms: inside classrooms that follow the National curriculum, and outside classrooms that follow the boarding school curriculum. This school combines formal education with boarding living, where students reside on campus and follow a set daily schedule. English is taught as a required subject at the junior and senior high school levels, and the institution places equal value on both religious principles and academic success. As a boarding school, students are surrounded by a unique atmosphere that combines education, extracurricular activities, and discipline in a cohesive environment. This school environment provides students with opportunities to practice English through peer communication, study groups, and teacher-led activities.

**Research Participants**

The subjects of this study are two English teachers from a boarding school setting at the 8th-grade junior high school level, both inside and outside the classroom. The following criteria were used to select them through purposive sampling: (1) both teachers were directly in control of teaching English classes; (2) they had taught in boarding schools for at least two years, ensuring familiarity with the particular setting and the educational requirements of the students; and (3) they had used a variety of strategies to promote students' speaking competence, making them relevant to the purpose of the study objective. These requirements ensured that the chosen teachers could provide comprehensive, particular details about the strategies that they employed and how they were applied in the classroom.

**Data Collection**

The researchers gathered data through semi-structured interviews with participants and direct observation of the EFL teaching and learning process. Two teachers were interviewed as part of the research data collection method. The

researchers then questioned all participants with their permission; all participants' responses were audio-recorded and transcribed. Each teacher participated in three sessions of classroom observations, each taking approximately thirty minutes. The purpose of these observations was to capture the strategies that teachers utilized during important speaking-related classroom activities. Additionally, the two teachers were interviewed individually for around fifteen minutes in semi-structured interviews. After the observations were completed, interviews were planned to provide teachers with an opportunity to consider and discuss their teaching strategies.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Several techniques were used to guarantee the validity and trustworthiness of the results. First, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and classroom observations were combined to apply method triangulation. According to Yin (2009), employing a variety of evidence sources strengthens the validity of case study conclusions. Both teachers were given access to interview summaries and preliminary interpretations as a result of the second member verification process, which allowed them to confirm the accuracy of the data. Before data collection, participants provided written consent after being fully informed about the study's objectives and procedures.

**Data Analysis**

The research employed thematic content analysis to analyze the data from interview questions and responses. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. It involved six steps: organizing and preparing the data, thoroughly reviewing all the data, conducting a detailed analysis with a coding process, generating a description of the data, representing themes in a qualitative narrative, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013).

**Results**

In this research, the Boarding School provides various learning environments, including language learning both inside and outside the classroom, which follow the national curriculum. The teaching and learning process outside the classroom were more adaptable and focused on continued language practice. Based on the data received from the research, four teaching strategies were used by the teachers inside the classroom.

### The strategies used by the teachers inside the classroom of the Boarding School.

Table 1: Themes for strategies used by the teachers inside the classroom

of the Boarding school.

| No. | Teaching Strategies | Implementation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Vocabulary drilling | The teacher introduced expressions of compliments, and students used dictionaries to check meanings. Students practiced the expressions collectively, wrote short dialogues, and performed them in front of class. The teacher emphasized vocabulary as a foundation and corrected pronunciation, accuracy, and comprehension after performances. |
| 2. | Question-and-answer sessions | Students actively responded to opening questions, such as *"What is the expression of compliments?"* to activate prior knowledge. The teacher guided the discussion and provided immediate feedback to maintain fluency and confidence. |
| 3. | Group work/role-play | Students formed groups to create dialogues incorporating new expressions. They performed role-plays in front of class while the teacher observed and provided constructive feedback on pronunciation, delivery, and comprehension. |
| 4. | Discussions | The teacher encouraged discussion on the meanings of expressions and their use in real-life situations. Students negotiated meaning, translated sentences with dictionaries, and shared ideas collectively. |

### The strategies used by the teachers outside the classroom of the Boarding School.

Based on the research data, four teaching strategies were used by the teachers outside the classroom.

Table 2: Themes for strategies used by the teacher outside

the classroom of the Boarding school

| No. | Teaching Strategies | Implementation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Vocabulary drilling and memorization | Students memorized weekly vocabulary lists and constructed sentences to reinforce their learning. The teacher guided students in correct pronunciation and meaning, checked comprehension individually, and ensured that they applied vocabulary in sentences and conversations. |
| 2. | Question-and-answer sessions | Students practiced forming questions and answering with newly learned vocabulary. Teacher monitored responses, corrected errors, and promoted fluency. |
| 3. | Peer collaboration | Students practiced dialogues and short conversations with peers in open spaces such as the school field and the dormitory. The teacher encouraged cooperative learning and guided interaction to ensure accurate usage. |
| 4. | Conversations | Students created sentences and engaged in practical conversations using target vocabulary. The teacher emphasized real-life communication, provided feedback, and linked practice to authentic scenarios (e.g., outdoor role-play, dormitory interaction). |

## Discussion

The results of the researchers' classroom observations and interviews with both EFL teachers, conducted both inside and outside their classrooms, revealed several strategies employed in their teaching and learning processes. The first teacher, who was inside the classroom, employed a variety of strategies, including vocabulary drilling, question-and-answer sessions, discussions, and group work. The above strategies demonstrate a systematic approach to speaking development, whereby interactional activities such as Q&A and group discussions provide opportunities for meaningful communication, while vocabulary serves as the essential foundation. This is consistent with the fundamentals of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which encourages real-world language use above rote memorization (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The second teacher, from outside the classroom, also employed communicative techniques such as group work, discussions, and Q&A sessions. Besides, it placed more emphasis on memorizing and vocabulary drills. The

activities initially seem to be more similar to conventional teaching strategies, whereby students only repeat and retain words. However, students were not only learning the words but also implementing them in authentic communication, as the teacher incorporated them into group work and conversations. This demonstrates that the teacher was attempting to support students in developing appropriate vocabulary and improving their speaking fluency. Outside-classroom strategies are especially beneficial in boarding school environments, where students spend a significant amount of time together, as they allow students to practice speaking English in more natural contexts and expand their communicative practice into real-life situations.

Based on both Teachers' findings, vocabulary mastery is established as the foundation of building students' speaking competence. They follow a step-by-step curriculum that begins with vocabulary memorization and drilling, progresses to sentence construction, and continues with the development of communicative usage. This strategy acknowledges that before students can engage in speaking communication, they need to have a strong vocabulary foundation. According to Kazemi (2018), students with a richer vocabulary gave more accurate and fluent oral presentations. These results directly support teacher efforts to ensure students can actively use words in speech, in addition to understanding their meanings.

Additionally, a broad vocabulary range allows students to convert passive word knowledge into active use during communication, which supports the idea that students with larger receptive vocabulary sizes are more likely to be lexically proficient in speaking (Nation, 2013; Tong et al., 2022). The strategies used by the teachers here reveal how vocabulary enrichment, through memory and contextual practice, enhances students' speaking competence (De Jong et al., 2012; Koizumi & In'nami, 2013). In line with Suryanto et al. (2021), the research found that the correlation between vocabulary mastery and students' English-speaking skills needs to be further explored. This is because vocabulary mastery is crucial for students to develop good speaking skills.

The use of conversation and Q&A is one of the teaching strategies that demands spontaneous responses rather than memorized sentences, leading students to speak English more naturally. According to Zhu et al. (2021), the goal is to provide specific answers in response to questions posed in natural language processing (NLP). This provides more opportunities for students to share their thoughts, making the classroom a more engaging and active space. For dialogue, Moses et al. (2019) stated that dialogue has significant potential to foster natural communication. Active language processing is involved in the complex procedures of speaking and listening. Students usefully perceive and comprehend spoken language by using a strategy that involves analyzing statements based on their context. Moreover, group work involves students collaborating to complete a project or presentation, and resolving a series of issues that increase their speaking

opportunities. This presents individuals with a chance to express their various points of view, fostering collaboration and negotiation skills, and promoting student autonomy (Harmer, 2015).

In addition, the implementation of both inside and outside the classroom involved teachers' teaching strategies being put into practice to support boarding school students in becoming more proficient speakers. Inside the classroom, the teacher focused on enhancing vocabulary as the foundation of speaking. She requested that students practice conversations in groups or pairs, bring dictionaries, and translate dialogues. Students' pronunciation, comprehension, and fluency improved with regular practice, modeling, and correction. For teachers outside the classroom, implementing effective teaching and learning strategies is crucial for supporting students in building speaking competence.

This can be achieved by asking students to construct sentences for oral practice, offering vocabulary lists for memorization, and individually testing their memory. Teachers also gathered students in open locations, such as the school field, to engage in dialogue performances with peer interaction. These strategies created a safe and secure environment for speaking, allowing students to practice their English outside of scheduled classes. Teachers and students alike emphasized how these activities promoted the use of English in real-world contexts, boosted participation, and boosted confidence.

Through the use of diverse strategies in the boarding school setting, students are given numerous opportunities to interact with the target language. In this setting, students engage in continuous language practice outside the classroom through peer interactions, group projects, and discussions. The role of engaging and varied teaching strategies in motivating students and enhancing their language skills. In EFL classrooms, student engagement is essential to promoting successful learning (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). Students learn more effectively when they are engaged and focused throughout class activities, especially when it comes to improving their speaking competence. Students are expected to be fully engaged and focused on the various classroom activities. Since it ensures that students are involved in assignments and enjoy the learning process.

Therefore, EFL teachers play a critical role in promoting language learning (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021). They assist students in practicing language in real-world situations by providing them with direction, helpful feedback, and opportunities to engage in meaningful classroom interactions. Teachers can guarantee that students stay engaged in activities, take chances while speaking the target language, and reinforce their learning. In essence, the teacher's assistance serves as a bridge between the students' current skill level and their learning objectives, thereby increasing engagement and participation.

Since students at boarding schools interact with English outside the classroom for extended periods, they present special opportunities for immersive learning when compared to day schools. Nonetheless, this study found that teachers continued to use conventional methods, such as memorizing and drilling, even in this setting, indicating that immersion alone does not ensure communicative competence unless student-centered strategies are employed. According to this interaction, boarding schools offer unique opportunities to introduce communicative instruction outside of the classroom, creating a more engaging environment for language acquisition.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal that both teachers, inside and outside the classroom, employed many strategies to build speaking competence in boarding school students. The first teacher, who was inside the classroom, employed a variety of strategies, including vocabulary drilling, question-and-answer sessions, discussions, and group work. Meanwhile, the second teacher from outside the classroom employed a range of teaching strategies, including group work, vocabulary drilling and memorization, as well as question-and-answer sessions and conversations. These strategies enable students to use English in more active and real-world situations.

The combination of these strategies demonstrates how interaction and structured vocabulary preparation promote speaking accuracy and fluency. The boarding school setting is an ideal environment to foster speaking competence, as it provides continuous reinforcement of learning both inside and outside the classroom. This setting emphasizes the teacher's role in offering meaningful and ongoing opportunities for language practice. Therefore, teachers can motivate students to become active speakers.

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