



Teacher Challenges and Strategies in Implementing the Deep Learning Approach to Improve Speaking Skills in Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the application of the deep learning approach in learning speaking skills in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with a focus on teacher experiences, challenges, and strategies. This research is motivated by the need for more meaningful and student-centered speaking learning, where students not only understand the structure of language, but are also able to use it confidently in real communication. This study uses a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry method to explore the experience of an English teacher at SMA Negeri 2 Pamekasan. Data were collected through a narrative framework and semi-structured interviews, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study show that the application of the deep learning approach in speaking learning is a complex and contextual process, involving cognitive, affective, and situational aspects. Three main themes were found in the study. First, meaningful speaking learning emphasizes the importance of real context, active engagement, and strengthening student confidence. Second, challenges in learning to speak include students' anxiety, limited learning time, and differences in ability levels in the classroom. Third, teacher strategies include the application of scaffolding, the creation of a supportive learning environment, the use of engaging activities, the provision of constructive feedback, and reflection practices. These findings show that the success of speaking learning is determined not only by linguistic aspects, but also by students' psychological readiness and teacher ability to adapt learning strategies. Thus, the deep learning approach has strong potential in improving speaking skills through meaningful and reflective learning, although its implementation requires continuous adjustment to classroom conditions.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly connected and competitive global education environment, English language skills, especially speaking skills, are essential competencies for students to communicate effectively, express ideas, and develop critical thinking skills. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking skills are often considered the most challenging skills because they require language mastery as well as the courage to interact spontaneously.

However, in reality, many students still struggle to develop speaking skills due to limited opportunities to practice authentic communication in the classroom. Khalishah & Islam, (2024) states that EFL students often have difficulty speaking due to a lack of spontaneous communication practices and embarrassment when making mistakes in front of their peers. Similar findings were also presented by Aprilia & Santoso (2024) who showed that students' perception of their speaking ability was greatly influenced by learning experiences during the pandemic, where verbal interaction became very limited. This condition shows that improving speaking skills requires a learning approach that can actively involve students in the process of meaningful communication.

One of the approaches that is starting to get attention in language learning is the deep learning approach. This approach emphasizes deep understanding, reflection, and active involvement of students in the learning process, rather than just memorizing information on the surface. In this context, learning focuses not only on material mastery, but also on transforming learning experiences into critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Panggua et al. (2025) affirm that the use of artificial intelligence-based digital tools, such as instant pronunciation feedback and a non-judgmental practice environment, can increase EFL students' confidence and participation in speaking activities. Additionally, Liu (2024) explains that deep learning technology can be used to evaluate various aspects of speaking ability such as pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy, thereby helping learners improve their speaking skills through continuous feedback.

In addition, recent research also highlights the importance of teacher reflective practices in supporting deep learning. Ho Chi Minh et al. (2023) emphasized that reflection in teaching practice encourages teacher to continue to adapt learning strategies to the needs of students so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and collaborative. The results of their research show that teacher reflective activities have a direct influence on increasing students' motivation and learning outcomes in language learning. In addition, Alnasyan et al. (2024) in their systematic study revealed that the application of deep learning in digital-based language learning is able to strengthen empathy and interaction between teacher and students through providing more personalized feedback, so that communication in the educational environment becomes more authentic and humane.

In the context of education in Indonesia, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires teacher to create more innovative, participatory, and reflective learning. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning and active student involvement in the learning process. However, the application of the deep learning approach in speaking learning still faces various challenges. Ningsih et al. (2024) stated that teacher often have difficulty creating a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to actively speak because students tend to be afraid of making mistakes in public and learning materials that are too dense. In addition, Fitriana et al. (2024) found that the use of technology-supported digital storytelling can increase students' motivation and

participation in speaking activities while reducing obstacles such as limited facilities and fear of making mistakes.

Although various studies have discussed strategies to improve students' speaking skills, most of them focus more on teaching methods or the use of technology in language learning. Research that specifically examines teacher experiences in applying deep learning approaches in speaking learning in real classroom contexts is still relatively limited. Norasiah et al. (2023) show that the use of creative media can increase student participation in learning activities, but the study has not revealed in depth how teacher build meaning, reflection, and learning strategies during the process.

Thus, there is still a research gap in understanding how teacher experience, interpret, and reflect on the application of deep learning approaches in learning to speak in specific educational contexts. In the Madura context, cultural values such as respect, social hierarchy, and communication norms can influence classroom interactions and students' courage to speak. Wei (2023) explains that the narrative inquiry approach is the right method to understand the reality of education through teacher experiences and reflective stories. Through this approach, researchers can explore how teacher interpret their experiences in dealing with various learning challenges and how they develop teaching strategies that are appropriate to local contexts.

Based on the research gap, this study aims to explore the experience of English teacher in applying a deep learning approach to improve students' speaking skills at SMA Negeri 2 Pamekasan. In particular, this study seeks to answer several research questions, namely: (1) what are the challenges faced by teacher in applying deep learning approaches to improve students' speaking skills, (2) what strategies do teacher use to overcome these challenges, and (3) how do teacher reflect on their experiences in applying deep learning approaches in speaking learning.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on examining teacher narrative experiences in applying an in-depth learning approach in speaking learning in the local Indonesian context. Using a narrative inquiry approach, this study provides a deeper understanding of the reflections, strategies, and challenges teacher face in implementing deep learning in real-world classroom situations. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more contextual, reflective, and meaningful English learning practices at the secondary education level in Indonesia.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry method to explore teacher experiences in applying the deep learning approach in speaking learning. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is to deeply understand teacher experiences, reflections, and strategies in dealing with the challenges of learning to speak in class. Narrative inquiry is a research approach that focuses on the exploration of human experience in a social context, time, and place through stories told by participants. Smith (2019) explains that narrative inquiry helps researchers understand the relationship between individual experiences and the educational context in which those experiences occur.

In addition, Wei (2023) states that this approach is effective for exploring teacher professional reflections as well as their identity changes during the learning process. Using this approach, the research can describe teacher experiences in a more contextual and reflective way in the application of deep learning approaches to improve students' speaking skills.

This research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Pamekasan by involving one English teacher as the main participant in the research. Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques by considering certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria include: (1) English teacher who are actively teaching at SMA Negeri 2 Pamekasan, (2) have at least three years of teaching experience, (3) have experience in applying deep learning approaches in speaking learning, and (4) are willing to share teaching experiences in depth. The selection of one participant allows researchers to gain a more focused and in-depth understanding of the teachers experience in the context of the learning being studied. The selected teacher is a female teacher with six years of teaching experience.

Data collection in this study was carried out through two main techniques, namely narrative frames and semi-structured interviews. In qualitative research, researchers play a role as the main instrument in the process of data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2013). The narrative framework was used to obtain initial stories from participants regarding their experiences in applying deep learning approaches in speaking learning. According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014), a narrative framework is a written story template that contains incomplete sentences that allow participants to complete their stories based on personal experiences. The instrument is designed to help participants narrate their experiences chronologically by taking into account the dimensions of interaction, continuity of time, and context of the situation. In addition, semi-structured interviews are used to dig deeper information about teacher experiences, challenges, strategies, and reflections in the speaking learning process. Interviews are conducted flexibly using pre-structured question guides to ensure that the data obtained remains relevant to the research focus.

The research procedure follows the steps of narrative inquiry proposed by Creswell (2013). The first stage is to identify the phenomenon to be researched, namely the application of the deep learning approach in speaking learning by English teacher. The second stage is to select participants purposively based on predetermined criteria. The third stage is to collect stories from participants through narrative frameworks and interviews. Next, the researcher carried out a restoring process, which is reconstructing the participants' experiences in the form of a systematic narrative by paying attention to the chronology of events and the context of the experience. Afterwards, the researchers collaborated with the participants to ensure that the constructed narrative accurately represented their experiences. The last stage is to report the results of the research in the form of narrative analysis that describes the teachers experience in applying the deep learning approach in speaking learning.

The data analysis in this study was carried out through the process of coding and grouping themes. The data obtained from the narrative framework and interviews are first transcribed and read repeatedly to understand the meaning contained in them. Furthermore, the researcher identified the main themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, such as teacher challenges in implementing the deep learning approach, strategies used to overcome these challenges, and teacher reflections on the results of applying the approach. The coding process is carried out to group the data into certain categories, making it easier for researchers to interpret the meaning of the experiences narrated by the participants. Through this thematic analysis, teacher experiences can be presented systematically and provide a deeper understanding of the application of deep learning approaches in speaking learning.

To maintain the quality and validity of research data, the researcher applies several validation strategies in qualitative research, namely data triangulation and member checking. Triangulation is carried out by comparing data obtained from two main sources, namely narrative frameworks and interviews, so that the information obtained becomes more comprehensive. Meanwhile, member checking was carried out by asking participants to review the results of the interpretation of the data that had been compiled by the researcher to ensure that the narrative written accurately represented their experiences. In addition, the researcher also conducts a process of reflection and data audit to ensure that all interpretations produced are based on valid and accountable data evidence.

3. Result

The results of this study show that the application of the deep learning approach in speaking learning is a complex and contextual process, involving the interaction between pedagogical, psychological, and situational aspects in the classroom. Based on the analysis of narrative data, the research findings are grouped into three main themes, namely meaningful speaking learning, challenges in speaking learning, and teacher strategies in overcoming these challenges. These three themes reflect an ongoing process in which teacher actively adapt learning practices to student needs and classroom conditions.

Meaningful Speaking Learning

The findings show that learning to speak is interpreted as a process of developing contextual communication skills and student confidence, not just mastering language structures. Teacher view that the success of speaking learning is determined not only by students' linguistic abilities, but also by their courage in expressing ideas orally. In practice, teacher place speaking skills as an important part of learning because they relate directly to students' communication needs in real life.

"I quite often focus on developing speaking skills because I think these skills are very important, not only for language skills, but also to train students' confidence when they have to speak in front of others. Many students can actually understand, but they don't dare to speak."

These findings suggest that there is a gap between students' understanding and their ability to express language orally. Therefore, teacher not only focus on the cognitive aspect, but also strive to create a safe and supportive learning environment so that students feel comfortable trying to speak without fear of making mistakes. In this context, learning to speak is the process of forming active and continuous communication habits.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that speaking learning becomes more meaningful when it is associated with the student's real-life context. Teacher uses a variety of interactive activities such as role plays, dialogues, and group discussions to help students understand the use of language in everyday situations.

"I usually use activities such as role play, dialogue, and group discussions. For example, I create situations like shopping, ordering food, or everyday conversations. That way students can imagine the situation and it's easier to talk, because they feel it's close to their lives."

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In addition, teacher provide students with the opportunity to develop dialogue independently so that they not only memorize, but also understand the purpose of communication.

"Not only do I ask students to memorize the text, but I also ask them to understand and develop their own dialogue according to the given situation."

The selection of learning topics has also proven to be an important factor in increasing student engagement.

"I usually choose topics that are close to their lives, such as hobbies or personal experiences, because students are easier to talk to."

Conversely, irrelevant topics cause students to become passive.

"If the topic is too far removed from their experience, students usually become passive and don't know what to say."

Overall, these findings suggest that meaningful speaking learning is determined by contextual relevance, student active engagement, and the provision of space for students to develop communication independently

Challenges in Speaking Instruction

The findings show that teacher face various challenges in multidimensional speech learning, including student psychological factors, time constraints, and diversity of abilities in the classroom. One of the main challenges is the low confidence of students which causes them to be reluctant to speak despite understanding the material.

"There are students who immediately dare to speak, but there are also those who are so afraid of making mistakes, especially in pronunciation or grammar, that they prefer to remain silent."

These findings suggest that the main barriers to learning to speak are not only linguistic, but also related to the affective aspects of students, such as fear and anxiety. This condition causes some students to become passive and less involved in learning activities.

In addition, low student participation is also a significant challenge.

"Not all students want to be actively involved. There are some students who just listen without trying to speak."

These findings show a gap between comprehension and the ability to express language orally. This challenge is increasingly complex with limited learning time.

"The limited learning time made it impossible for me to give all the students a chance to speak."

In addition, the difference in the level of ability of students in one class is also an obstacle in the implementation of learning.

"If the material is too difficult, the less capable students become passive, but if it is too easy, the more capable students feel bored."

Overall, these findings suggest that challenges in speech learning reflect the complexity of classroom conditions, which require teacher to be able to balance different needs of students simultaneously.

Teacher Strategies in Implementing Deep Learning

The findings show that teacher develop a variety of adaptive strategies in applying deep learning approaches to address the challenges of speaking learning. The strategy focuses on increasing student involvement, creating a supportive learning atmosphere, and developing a reflection process in learning.

One of the main strategies is to give all students the opportunity to speak gradually, especially for students who lack confidence.

"I always give all students the opportunity to speak, even to passive students, even if they only speak in simple sentences."

This approach helps students to get used to speaking without feeling pressured. In addition, teacher also apply a gradual approach in learning.

"I started with a simple activity first, then slowly increased the difficulty level."

Teacher also try to create a fun learning atmosphere to reduce students' anxiety.

"I make speaking activities fun, for example with games or casual discussions."

In addition, feedback is provided constructively to maintain student confidence.

"I don't immediately blame students when they are wrong, but give corrections slowly."

Teacher also encourage students to reflect on their learning process.

"I ask students to reflect on what they have learned so that they know their progress."

Overall, these findings show that the strategies implemented by teacher are oriented towards an inclusive, gradual, and reflective learning process, so that they can support student involvement in speech learning more optimally.

4. Discussion

The first findings show that speaking learning is interpreted as a process oriented towards developing contextual communication skills and increasing student confidence. This indicates that the success of learning to speak is not solely determined by mastery of language structures, but also by students' ability to express ideas orally in meaningful situations. In the perspective of deep learning, this condition shows that learning occurs optimally when students are able to relate new knowledge to their personal experiences, resulting in a deeper and more lasting understanding. Thus, learning to speak is no longer mechanical, but becomes an active and reflective process of meaning construction.

Furthermore, the use of activities such as role play, contextual dialogue, and group discussions shows that teachers strive to create learning experiences that are authentic and relevant to students' lives. The activity not only increases student engagement, but also provides an opportunity for them to practice the language in real-world situations. When students feel that what they are learning has a direct connection to everyday life, they tend to be more motivated to participate actively. This finding is in line with Safira and Astuti (2025) who emphasized that the implementation of deep learning in ELT through cooperative learning can improve the quality of oral communication because it involves the cognitive and emotional aspects of students simultaneously.

In addition, providing opportunities for students to develop dialogue independently shows a shift in the learning paradigm from reproductive to productive. Students are not only required to memorize texts, but are also encouraged to understand the purpose of communication and develop their own expressions. This reinforces that deep learning encourages students to become active learners who can build and transform knowledge. Suri (2024) also emphasized that teacher strategies in improving deeper learning skills make a significant contribution to improving speaking skills because students are directly involved in the process of using language in real life.

However, the findings also show that the meaning of learning is greatly influenced by the relevance of the topics used. Topics that are close to students' lives have been shown to increase their participation and confidence, while topics that are too abstract or far from students' experiences actually cause passivity. This shows that the selection of learning materials is a strategic factor in creating effective learning. Thus, teachers not only play the role of delivering material, but also as designers of learning experiences that are able to bridge the gap between learning content and the reality of students' lives.

Challenges in Speaking Instruction

The second finding shows that speech learning is faced with various challenges that are multidimensional, especially related to the affective aspects of students, limited learning time, and diversity of abilities in the classroom. One of the main challenges found is the low confidence of students which causes them to be reluctant to speak, even though they have cognitively an understanding of the material. This indicates that the obstacles in learning to speak lie not only in the linguistic aspect, but also in the psychological conditions that affect the readiness of students to communicate.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of foreign language anxiety, where students experience anxiety when they have to use a foreign language in communication situations. This anxiety often arises due to fear of making mistakes, fear of being judged by friends, or lack of previous speaking experience. This condition causes students to prefer to be silent rather than take the risk of speaking. These findings are in line with Jannah and Hizriani (2025) who affirm that teacher strategies in developing students' emotional competencies have a significant impact on oral communication performance and can hinder their participation in learning.

In addition to affective factors, limited learning time is also a significant challenge in the implementation of speaking learning. In large classroom conditions, teachers have difficulty giving equal opportunities to speak to all students. This shows an imbalance between the demands of the curriculum that must be solved and the need for students to get enough speaking practice. Husnaini et al. (2024) emphasized that time constraints and various obstacles are often the main obstacles in language learning, especially in the development of productive skills such as speaking.

Another challenge that is no less important is the diversity of students' abilities in one class. The difference in ability level causes teacher to adjust their learning strategies to reach all students effectively. If the material given is too difficult, students with low abilities will have difficulties and become passive. Conversely, if the material is too easy, students with high abilities will feel less challenged. This condition shows that learning to speak requires a flexible and differential approach. Dursun and Aykan (2025) emphasize that teacher narrative understanding of challenges and strategies is essential in heterogeneous classroom contexts to ensure that all students can thrive according to their abilities.

Overall, these findings suggest that learning to speak is a complex and dynamic process, influenced by a variety of internal and external factors. Therefore, a deep understanding of classroom conditions and high adaptability of teacher in managing learning are needed

Teacher Strategies in Implementing Deep Learning

The third finding shows that teacher is developing a variety of adaptive strategies in applying deep learning approaches to address challenges in speaking learning. The strategies used not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also include affective and social dimensions that play an important role in learning success. This shows that teacher not only play the role of teacher, but also facilitators who create learning conditions that support the overall development of students.

One of the main strategies found is to provide speaking opportunities gradually, especially for students who lack confidence. This approach allows students to build courage slowly through repetitive and structured speaking experiences. This strategy reflects the concept of scaffolding, where teacher provide support tailored to the needs of students until they are able to learn independently. Priyantini and Herawati (2023) stated that teacher strategies in facing challenges are very important in helping students achieve optimal ability development.

In addition, teacher also create a fun learning atmosphere through the use of activities such as games, casual discussions, and simulations. A positive learning environment has been shown to reduce students' anxiety and increase their engagement in learning. When students feel comfortable, they are more courageous to try and are not afraid to make mistakes. This is in line with Suri (2024) who emphasized that the strategy of improving deeper learning skills has a significant influence on the success of language learning.

Providing constructive feedback is also an important strategy in supporting speech learning. The teacher does not directly correct the student's mistakes in a judgmental way, but gives direction gradually so that students can understand and correct their mistakes. This approach helps maintain student confidence while improving the quality of learning. Safira and Astuti (2025) stated that the implementation of deep learning through a cooperative approach can increase student motivation and participation in language learning.

Furthermore, the reflection practice applied by teacher shows that speaking learning focuses not only on the final outcome, but also on the learning process that students experience. Through reflection, students can understand their development, identify weaknesses, and plan for future improvements. Dursun and Aykan (2025) emphasized that teacher narratives regarding strategies and challenges are an important

component of continuous learning because they help students and teacher to continue to improve the quality of learning practices.

Overall, the strategies implemented by teacher show that deep learning approaches can be implemented effectively through a combination of gradual learning, a supportive environment, constructive feedback, and reflection practices. This strategy not only improves students' speaking skills, but also shapes a more meaningful, active, and sustainable learning experience.

5. Conclusion

This section concludes that the application of deep learning approaches in speech learning is a complex and contextual process, involving the interplay between cognitive, affective, and situational aspects in the classroom. The findings of the study show that speaking learning becomes more meaningful when it is associated with the student's real-life context, involves active participation, and provides space for students to develop communication skills independently. Thus, the success of learning is not only determined by the mastery of linguistic aspects, but also by the level of confidence and psychological readiness of students in communicating.

This study also revealed that the main challenges in learning to speak include low student confidence, limited learning time, and diversity of abilities in one class. This condition requires teacher to be able to manage learning flexibly and adaptively. In this case, the strategies applied by teacher, such as providing speaking opportunities gradually, creating a supportive learning atmosphere, using fun activities, and providing constructive feedback, have been proven to support student involvement in speaking learning more optimally.

However, this study also has limitations, including involving only one participant so that the findings are contextual, and have not directly involved the perspective of students. In addition, this study does not measure the improvement of speaking skills quantitatively, so the results of the study focus more on the meaning of teacher experiences in the context of learning.

Based on these findings, further research is recommended to involve more participants from various contexts, using a mixed methods approach, as well as examining students' perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding. In addition, the exploration of the use of technology in supporting deep learning-based learning is also an important recommendation for future research.

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