

EXPLORING TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES TEACHING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS IN RELIGIOUS BILINGUAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Teaching English speaking skills in religious bilingual high school comes with its own set of challenges which shaped by the school environment, students' backgrounds, and language expectations. This study aims to understand what difficulties faced and what strategies used by teachers to help students' speaking abilities get improved. The research employed qualitative methods, the data collection gathered from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The results show that teachers often deal with issue such as students' low confidence, different levels of language ability, first-language influence, and limited chances for students to use English in real situations. To overcome these challenges, teachers rely on several methods like scaffolding, communicative activities, digital tools, and encourage students. Overall, the study highlights the need for flexible teaching approaches, teachers better school support, and developing more opportunities for students to engage in practicing English speaking skills.

Keywords: English Speaking Skills, Teaching Strategies, Teachers' Challenges

Introduction

Enhancing oral proficiency in English continues to be a primary objective in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula, especially in environments that prioritize communicative skills. Effective speaking goes beyond mere grammatical accuracy to include fluency, clear pronunciation, and contextual language application, all of which demand both emotional preparedness and cognitive skills. In Indonesian High Schools, fostering learner's speaking abilities remains one of the most persistent problems (Nasihin & Oktarini, 2022). Recent empirical studies have repeatedly highlighted key obstacles at the student level that hinder speaking including diminished self-assurance, performance anxiety, insufficient vocabulary, and inadequate practice opportunities. Some difficulties in achieving accuracy, fluency, and confidence also become the most prominent challenges (Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025). For instance, a study from Shalehah & Rahmawati (2025), through a narrative inquiry involving students at an Islamic senior high school, observed that learners at all proficiency levels faced challenges from anxiety, restricted resources availability, and vocabulary shortcomings. Sari (2025), in a comparative analysis of high and low performing students within an Indonesian pesantren setting, determined that high achievers were primarily held back by emotional and situational factors, whereas low achievers encountered further obstacles in linguistic areas such as grammar and vocabulary along with a lack of encouragement. Those results are in line with broader EFL research which shows how actually psychological (internal) barriers are interconnected with contextual, resource based, and institutional (external) barriers in undermining speaking ability (Szyszka et al., 2024).

Because of those barriers, the role of teacher strategies plays an important role. Teacher's decision regarding activity formats, classroom interactions, feedback mechanism, and

collaborative approaches such as peer or small group activities and role-play, etc. become a major role in mediating opportunities for learners to speak without fear and to build skills progressively. Recent studies show how such strategies can reduce speech barriers. Bai & Xian (2024) found that the integration of digital storytelling (DST) enhanced learners' speaking practice while also simultaneously reducing their anxiety. Ali et al. (2025) reported that teachers in a bilingual high school environment used role-plays, debates, and tailored feedback to boost fluency and confidence among students facing speaking barriers. Furthermore, it turns out according to Ding (2021) through encouraging feedback, emphatic communication, and genuine attention to students' need, teachers can reduce fear and anxiety to help learners feel confident to speak, make mistakes, and try again.

Nevertheless, even with a growing research base, the intersections between bilingual teaching, religious education environments, and speaking instruction at the senior high school level has received limited attention. Bilingual curricula present unique challenges beyond basic English instruction where teachers must align the objectives of delivering subject matter or religion with the development of language skills. Research conducted in bilingual education policies in Indonesian secondary schools shows persistent problems, including teachers' inadequate preparation for delivering content bilingually, excessive workloads, a lack of bilingual resources, and tensions between enforcing rigid curriculum standards and promoting interactive language use (Manik, 2025). Meanwhile, research in Islamic boarding schools shows the existence of environmental and institutional constraints such as rules or traditions about language use, integration of religious values, and expectations from parents or religious authorities can influence teachers' flexibility in designing speaking tasks (Maulana et al., 2023). Within these settings, teachers face the task of harmonizing adherence to spiritual principles, compliance with the bilingual mandate, and the development of effective speaking skills.

Indonesian religious senior high schools integrate multiple complexities of a rigorous curriculum and developmental stage of high school students, the demands of bilingual programs, and the distinctive cultural norms of faith-based education. However, international studies rarely address teachers' strategies and barriers to teaching speaking in environments that combine religious principles, high school education, and bilingual approaches. For example, a study from Angeles (2025) sheds light on how U.S. bilingual content teachers navigate conflicting demands of content and language instruction, while Creed et al. (2024) investigate how teachers in England cope with bilingual instruction amid curriculum and evaluation constraints. Still, significant gaps remain in understanding how teachers plan, adapt, and operate in bilingual classrooms in religious high schools. Furthermore, the interplay between teaching strategies, institutional support, professional preparation, and religiously informed policies and how these kinds of factors facilitate or hinder meaningful speaking practices is less thoroughly documented properly.

Thus, this study is design to explore those gaps. It explores teachers' strategies and challenges in teaching English skills in bilingual classes at religious senior high school. Specifically, this study has two objectives namely (1) to map the actual strategy employed by teachers for speaking development in this study context and (2) to identify challenges faced by teachers in this study context. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences and decision rationales, the findings are expected to be able to provide practical insights for teacher training, materials development, and the integration of technology in religious senior high school settings.

Literature Review

The Definition of Speaking Skills

Mastering spoken language is often considered as the most demanding aspect of learning a second language as it requires the learners' ability to coordinate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and an understanding of social and cultural norms all at once (Noiray et al., 2019). This principle means that speaking is an activity which involves both knowledge and skill. Knowledge encompasses linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge which refers to how the language is used appropriately in context. Meanwhile, the

skill component involves the learners' production skills and interaction skills to conduct and manage the conversation. Furthermore, speaking poses an additional challenge because it happens under strict time pressure since they need to process information, organize the ideas, and respond almost instantly (Srinivas & Bayramberdiyev, 2024). Unlike writing, learners have some time to pause, rethink, and revise.

The Strategies in Teaching Speaking Skills

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach remains one of the most influential methods in modern English instruction where it prioritizes real communication and meaningful interaction rather than repetitive grammar drills. A study conducted by Putri and Susiati (2025) on speaking techniques for Gen Z high school learners showed that role-plays, discussions, and presentations significantly support students' progress in English. Through role-play, learners can experiment with language in realistic scenarios, build confidence, and develop quick thinking which can train students' abilities. Another study also support that group discussions help both introverted and extroverted students to be able to communicate more confidently which indicates that flexible grouping strategies can support diverse learner personalities in bilingual classrooms (Yusuf et al., 2024). Moreover, presentation effectively sharpen students' speaking and overall communication skills by letting them practice structured oral delivery (Tawas et al., 2021).

The Challenges faced in Teaching English Speaking Skills

Speaking in English continues to be challenging for many students who learn English as a foreign language because several challenges often occur at the same time. In many communities where English is not commonly spoken, learners rarely experience authentic language outside the classroom. As a result, classroom lessons become the main source of spoken English. This lack of real-world exposure becomes more restrictive in bilingual settings where teachers also sometimes use the students' first language during teaching activities where it can reduce the opportunities for sustained English input. One of the most persistent challenges is vocabulary gaps. Many learners feel unable to speak in English because they do not know the necessary words which it leads them to frustration and sometime a fear of speaking (Sun et al., 2023). The pressures increase in Indonesian system where the examinations prioritize writing skills over oral communication (Djiwandono & Ginting, 2025). When major tests focus on grammar or written accuracy, then students will consider speaking practice less important because that skill is not being tested or scored. As a result, communicative activities in English may be sidelined in favor of exam preparation.

Research Method

A qualitative descriptive design was applied into this study to investigate teachers' strategies and challenges which they encounter when teaching English speaking skills in bilingual religious senior high schools. A qualitative approach was considered best because it allows close and deep engagement with teachers' lived experiences and the contextual factors that shape their performance in classroom practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants were two English teachers who were selected from one of the public religious senior high schools in Demak that implements bilingual programs. Both of them at least have 5 years' experience in teaching bilingual classes which ensured they could provide rich and deep instructional strategies.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to understand the problem and the research question deeper (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews were conducted for 45-60 minutes each, encouraging teachers to describe their approaches to run English speaking skills and the challenges they faced. To strengthen the credibility of this study, classroom observations were conducted in two learning sessions per teacher, focusing on interaction patterns and student engagement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lesson plans were also analyzed to provide contextual evidence of intended learning objectives and the integration of bilingual programs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To enhance trustworthiness, this study utilized methodological triangulation, checking members, and in-depth descriptions of the context as well. Ethical approval was obtained from the host religious senior high school, and all participants provided informed consent. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

Results

Analysis of the interview transcripts, classroom observation, and document analysis revealed that instructional obstacles in developing oral proficiency emerge from two interconnected dimensions namely teachers' side and students' side. Regarding the students' side, first, it is found that a large number of students are still unmotivated or unaware of the importance of learning English where it causes them to attend English classes merely because it is a requirement. Second, the large class size setting also triggers students' playful attitudes during the learning process. Meanwhile from the teachers' side, the challenges include managing large classrooms, selecting or adapting suitable materials, and creating a supportive learning environment. In other words, teachers must keep students engaged and motivated, ensure materials which meet the students' need and ability, and build a positive atmosphere where learners feel confident to speak English without the fear of making mistakes. Consequently, there are several challenges encountered and strategies conducted by the English teachers.

1. The challenges faced by English Teachers in teaching speaking skills in bilingual classroom

Table 1. Challenges 1

Teacher	Challenges
Teacher 1	<i>"... In my opinion, the classroom condition is the main factor. Sometimes the students joke around a lot, you know, so there are some students who just like to tease others. As a result, it makes the other students even more reluctant to come forward because their friends often mock or cheer loudly."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"... Most students still do not like English, they are not interested in learning it yet because they find it unappealing. As a result, they study half-heartedly, not out of their own genuine motivation. They come to school out of obligation. However, there are some who are capable, but only a few are truly aware of the need to develop themselves."</i>

According to the interview data, the first challenge encountered in teaching English speaking skills are the lack of motivation or awareness among students regarding the importance of learning English and negative behaviors exhibited by some students that have a huge potential in creating an uncondusive learning environment.

Table 2. Challenges 2

Teacher	Challenges
Teacher 1	<i>"... Usually, they get stuck because of grammar, they are afraid to speak due to grammatical concerns. Then, there is also the students' limited ability in pronunciation, their vocabulary is quite limited, so sometimes they speak halfway by mixing Indonesian and English. But still, it is fine as long as they have the courage to try. Confidence is also an issue, they tend to lack confidence and self belief."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"... The first problem is actually vocabulary. The second is pronunciation, because their pronunciation is not good, their confidence decreases, and they are afraid to speak, worrying that they might make mistakes."</i>

The other challenges faced by teachers also revealed two major problems namely linguistically, students often get difficulty in English speaking due to their limited vocabularies and

inappropriate pronunciation that lead them to mix English with Indonesian when speaking. Psychologically, due to their linguistic issues, it contributes to low self-confidence and fear of making grammatical mistakes so then it causes students to hesitate in expressing their ideas orally.

Table 3. Challenges 3

Teacher	Does time constraints affect your ability to teach speaking effectively?
Teacher 1	<i>"... Yes, because sometimes we are rushed by the material, like this month we have to reach a certain chapter. But sometimes, this has not been done yet, so in the end, I will just consider it finished. So, yes, I need quite a long time because I have to repeat it over and over like that."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"... Yes, clearly the time is insufficient for developing speaking skills, because we also have to share time with other subjects. Especially now, the study is only 3 hours, back it was 4 hours. So, time is also lacking."</i>

The findings reveal that teachers often struggle to balance two competing demands including ensuring comprehensive coverage of the prescribed curriculum while also allocating sufficient time for students to develop the students' speaking skills through practice. Thus, teachers' time constraints pose significant barriers to the development of speaking competence as educators are often forced to rush through lessons or the need to repeat subject matter repeatedly to help the students' comprehension.

2. The strategies implemented by English teachers in teaching speaking in bilingual classrooms

Table 4. Strategies 1

Teacher	Strategies
Teacher 1	<i>"...Dealing with non-conducive classroom conditions by providing simple song breaks related to the learning being taught."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"... I continue to face these challenges by striving to ensure that speaking classes do not feel stressful, because speaking activity often makes students afraid of making mistakes or feeling embarrassed about speaking. I always remind them that making mistake is a part of processes. The key is to foster confidence and make them feel like learning to speak is fun, not scary."</i>

The study shows that teachers employ engaging and supportive approaches to create a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Teacher 1 uses interactive activities like song breaks to manage classroom conditions, while teacher 2 emphasizes reducing students' anxiety by promoting confidence and considering mistakes as a step to grow. These two strategies define an effort to build a relaxed, motivating, and student-centered environment that encourages active participation in speaking activities.

Table 5. Strategies 2

Teacher	Strategies
Teacher 1	<i>"... I usually give the example and provide sentence starters, while also giving the explanation of grammatical structure. From the grammar structure, then they can create sentences that will be useful when they want to express their opinion."</i>
Teacher 2	<i>"... Actually, as modern technology, it makes it easier to learn. They can open the dictionary or utilize their phone like Google Translate or other supporting applications. When they utilize their devices to apply what has been taught. Unfortunately, most of them do not try to do it. They always depend on the teacher so then they cannot face the challenges given by the teacher independently."</i>

The data demonstrate that teacher 1 emphasizes providing structured linguistic support through examples and grammar explanations to help students express their ideas accurately, while teacher 2 highlights the importance of using technology as a learning aid to promote student independence. In conclusion, the strategies define an approach that aims at fostering both linguistic competence and learner autonomy in speaking activities.

Discussion

A. The challenges faced by English Teachers in Teaching Speaking Skills

The teacher interview revealed several complex teaching challenges that have huge potential to influence how English speaking is taught in religious bilingual senior high school. From the data, at least there are 6 interconnected issues experienced by teachers including classroom disruption, low motivation, language difficulties (such as anxiety over grammar, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation struggles), lack of confidence, and limited teaching time.

Disruptive Classroom Dynamics and Peer-Induced Anxiety

One of the main issues concerns classroom management and the way peer interactions can actually create an uncomfortable atmosphere for speaking practices. As “Teacher 1” mentioned that the classroom is the main factor because students often joke a lot around that lead other students to feel more reluctant to speak English due to being mocked loudly. This statement clearly shows how teasing from classmates can discourage students from speaking until it creates barriers to engagement that can hinder the other students' participation (Dietrich & Hofman, 2020).

This challenge reflects what numerous studies have shown that peer-induced anxiety is one of the biggest obstacles to developing speaking skills in the EFL classroom. The previous studies (Paraguas, 2025; Quvanch et al., 2024; Suratin & Sribayak, 2025) agree that teasing can seriously affect students' ability to speak English by increasing anxiety, fear of judgment, and feeling of social embarrassment. When classmates laugh at or point out the errors, students may get nervous and reluctant to participate even if they actually know the correct answers. Definitely, this emotional pressure not only limits the classroom engagement but also can slow students' language development. To counter this, teachers need to foster a supportive and respectful classroom atmosphere where mistakes should be seen as a normal part of the learning process. By creating such a safe environment, students can gain strong confidence to be able to take more risks and perform confidently in speaking activities (Tu, 2021).

Motivational Challenges and Perceived Irrelevance by Students

The second major challenge relates to low student motivation and engagement. Teacher 2 stated that most students still dislike English because they are not interested in learning English so as a result they study half-heartedly. This shows that most students' efforts are driven by external obligations rather than intrinsic interest or personal desire to learn. According to Pinz (2024) that learning driven by external pressures rather than personal interest tends to result in minimal effort, low persistence, and poorer outcomes. Supported by the study done by Greenwald et al. (2023) that intrinsic motivation fosters greater engagement, consistent effort, and improved academic performance.

Therefore, teachers play a crucial role beyond only delivering the materials, but they also need to create a learning environment that sparks curiosity, interest, and enthusiasm. Teachers can strengthen students' motivation by connecting material to real-life experiences or students' interests, providing positive feedback, and giving students opportunities to take responsibility and make choices in their learning style. By implementing these strategies, teachers will also have the awareness that they will not only deliver or present the material, but also to assist and guide students to discover their personal meaning and purpose in learning in order to foster their intrinsic motivation that will support students' long-term growth (Li et al., 2025).

Linguistic Barriers: Grammar Anxiety, Limited Vocabulary, and Pronunciation Challenges



Through the interviews, teachers reported that there is a set of interrelated language challenges that hindered students' speaking performances. Teacher 1 explained that usually the students get stuck because of grammar and it leads them to be afraid to speak due to grammatical concerns. Their fear is also supported by their limited pronunciation and vocabulary. As well as teacher 2, the main problem faced by the students is their lack of vocabulary and inappropriate pronunciation.

This observation reflects broader research showing that linguistic knowledge gaps are a major barrier to oral communication. In Indonesia, grammar anxiety may be exacerbated by traditional teaching approaches that prioritize grammatical knowledge over communicative competence (Herda et al., 2025). Nazri (2025) observed that although many students have strong declarative knowledge of English grammar, they struggle to apply it in everyday conversation. Teachers' statements that students are "stuck because of grammar" reflect this gap. Students may know the patterns of grammar, but they cannot use it fluently under the pressure of oral communication.

Subsequently, limited vocabulary is perhaps the most fundamental barriers. As the teachers noted, "students' vocabulary is limited," which often leads them to mix Indonesian and English which is commonly known as code switching. Research consistently shows that vocabulary size is the strongest predictor of speaking ability (Biseko, 2025). Additionally, Mustafa (2019) concludes that high school graduates in Indonesia generally do not meet the vocabulary standards set by the national curriculum which requires students to have around 2.000 words for junior high school and 3.000 words for senior high school. This vocabulary gap creates barriers because, regardless of how motivated and grammatically prepared students are, they will struggle to express their ideas which is resulting in frustration and communication breakdowns (Uchihara & Clenton, 2020).

Pronunciation challenges are the third major barriers. When students struggle to pronounce words correctly, they often become self-conscious and anxious about how they sound. This insecurity definitely can make them hesitant to speak, as their fear of being laughed at. Over time, the fear that the students experience will lead to avoidance behavior where students will speak less, participate less, and lose opportunities to practice. This situation creates a negative cycle such as poor pronunciation lowers confidence, low confidence reduces speaking practice, and limited practice keeps students' pronunciation weak (Yulianti et al., 2025). Therefore, to break this cycle, teachers are required to create a supportive environment where students feel safe to make mistakes and view pronunciation practice as a natural part of learning. It means this complex dynamic requires comprehensive pedagogical approaches rather than isolated interventions.

Confidence Deficits and Fear of Making Mistakes

Another challenge in teaching students' speaking performance that is pointed out by the teachers is the students' lack of confidence which often encompasses all linguistic difficulties. As the participants in this research said that confidence also becomes an issue which leads the students to be less confident and less self-assured. However, confidence is not simply a fixed personality trait, but it is actually formed and shaped by students' language abilities, their experiences in the classroom, and how their peers and teachers respond to them (Heil & Ifenthaler, 2025). According to MacIntyre (2020) confidence is not a permanent personality setting but it is fluid and changes moment to moment. Second language confidence is essentially a learner's assessment of how well they can handle a given communication situation. In this case, teacher observation indicates that students not only lacked overall confidence in using English but also felt hesitant when asked to speak in front of other classmates in the class.

A key factor which links low self-confidence to speaking avoidance is the fear of making mistakes. According to Ambawani et al. (2025) shows that perfectionism and error anxiety are the strongest psychological barriers for EFL learners. To overcome these confidence deficits requires what Ozdemir & Papi (2022) describes how growth vs. fixed mindsets affect speaking anxiety and confidence which will help students normalize mistakes as part of progress and see themselves as capable language users. Confidence and competence are closely linked. For instance, the study conducted by Xu et al. (2023) highlights that self-regulated learning

strategies are effective. By learning how to take control of their studies, students do not only improve their academic skills but also develop stronger confidence in their ability to succeed. In other words, as students become more skilled, their confidence grows and as confidence grows, they are more willing to practice and improve further. However, indeed, to break this negative cycle between low confidence and poor performance requires deliberate teaching strategies that foster linguistic skills and emotional resilience which help students speak more confidently and authentically.

Insufficient Instructional Time

The next obstacle that is encountered by the teachers in teaching speaking skills is the limited time available for English instruction. Both participants express their frustration clearly that most of the time they have to rush through the material and highlight how teachers are caught between demands of the curriculum and the time students actually need to build communicative competence. This finding reflects a common difficulty in language teaching that is balancing the pressure to complete a syllabus with required to develop speaking proficiency (Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025). Furthermore, teachers often feel obligated to follow the prescribed plan even when students have not mastered the material. This pressure is extreme in systems where exams focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than on actual communication skills Rihatmi et al. (2025). Then, teachers must often choose between completing the syllabus including teaching the grammatical patterns or developing students' ability to speak confidently.

Another issue lies in how English competes with the other subjects for limited class time. Moreover, in bilingual religious schools, for example, English is taught alongside Arabic, Islamic studies, and core academic subjects which creates a highly congested schedule (Madkur & As'ad, 2024). Within this tight curriculum, English especially speaking skills, often get sidelined in favor of reading and writing, which are more directly tested on the exams. This issue becomes even more challenging when many students basically start at a lower level of proficiency. These students require more guidance, more practice, and more feedback than more advanced students who basically already mastery the foundation (Pilu et al., 2025). However, the constraint time makes it impossible for the teachers to give students the repeated exposure and support the scaffolding they need. Therefore, without systemic changes that provide more time and flexibility, teachers will continue to struggle to provide students with the meaningful speaking practice they deserve.

The Interconnected Nature of Challenges

Those challenges do not operate independently, instead they form an interconnected system in which each challenge leads to another. For instance, when classroom interactions are disrupted by unhelpful peer behavior, students' anxiety tends to increase. Then, this anxiety discourages students from participating which will limit their speaking practice. Afterwards, with the fewer opportunities to practice, their confidence and competence fail to develop their progress which will leave gaps in their linguistic abilities. This problem is worsened by limited instructional time which prevents teachers from focusing on each problem or challenge they face that finally it becomes overlap and complex.

Understanding how these factors interrelate is crucial for educators and stakeholders to design meaningful solutions. Since focusing only on one area, for example grammar patterns, it will be ineffective if students remain anxious, unmotivated, or lack adequate practice opportunities. Similarly, the efforts to increase motivation alone will be ineffective if students lack the necessary language skills to express themselves. Therefore, a truly effective approach must address multiple aspects simultaneously using integrated strategies that develop both the emotional and linguistic aspects of learning.

B. The Strategies Employed by English Teachers in Teaching Speaking Skills

The interviews with the teachers revealed several thoughtful teaching strategies usually used to overcome the complex challenges of teaching speaking skills in bilingual classrooms in religious senior high school. Based on their experiences, at least four main approaches emerged. First, creating a positive and engaging atmosphere by utilizing music into the learning process.

Second, building a classroom environment that makes students feel emotionally safe to express their thoughts in English and emphasizing that making mistakes is seen as a normal and valuable part of learning. Third, providing clear linguistic guidance through modeling and structured support to help students develop their speaking skills step by step. Eventually, leveraging technology to encourage students to take more control of their own learning style.

Utilizing Songs to Shape a Positive Classroom Environment

Teacher one emphasized that the use of songs can be a powerful way to manage classroom dynamics and engage students who have lost focus back. Study by Bsharat et al. (2021) proved that the integration of songs in teaching has a positive and significant effect on students' learning outcomes especially in language acquisition contexts. Through songs, teachers can create an enjoyable and engaging learning environment that possibly enhances students' vocabulary size, pronunciation, and speaking skills. The use of songs provides many meaningful opportunities including reinforcing language patterns through repetition which can help lower students' anxiety so then it can boost a relaxed and supportive atmosphere to learn (Hidayatulla, 2025).

The teacher's emphasis on the relevance of songs to the lesson content also reflect sound pedagogical principles. A study conducted by Sadiqzade (2025) revealed that songs containing target vocabulary or grammar produced better learning outcomes than songs used solely for entertainment. Similarly, study by C. S. S. Putri et al. (2025) found that songs help reduce students' anxiety which allow them to subconsciously practice pronunciation and vocabulary without fear of making errors in front of others.

Creating Psychologically Safe Learning Environments

Unlike teacher one, teacher two emphasized that establishing psychologically safe classroom environment is fundamental to create effective speaking instruction. Teacher two explained since many students are afraid and stressful of making mistakes or feeling embarrassed when they are trying to speak English, he always reminds them that mistakes are part of learning. This focus on anxiety reduction aligns closely with Krashen (1982) well known Affective Filter Hypothesis which states that high levels of stress or fear can inhibit the mental processes needed for language acquisition. Therefore, when students perceive speaking as a threat rather than a challenge, their brains shift into a defensive mode which makes it difficult for them to think, remember, and produce language effectively (MacIntyre, 2020).

Encouraging students to view mistakes as part of progress is what educational psychologists call developing a growth mindset. According to Zhao et al. (2024), students who have growth mindset beliefs influence students' subjective well-being positively, achievement motivation, and persistence which all of them are important to sustain students' effort and academic success in high school and beyond. Zhang et al. (2025) found that when teachers respond to mistakes with encouragement rather than criticism, students become more supportive of each other. It also applies to conditions when students enjoy what they do, they will participate out of genuine interest not obligation. Over time, this can reshape classroom culture and reduce teasing or negative reactions.

Linguistic Scaffolding through Modeling and Structured Support

Another strategy used by teacher one to help students overcome grammar anxiety and vocabulary size is the use of explicit linguistic scaffolding. By giving examples and sentence starters, it can help students to construct the sentences that students want to use to express their opinions. This approach basically represents what sociocultural theory calls scaffolding which means a temporary support provided by teachers to help students complete tasks that they are not able to perform independently yet (Pinela Bajaña et al., 2025). Providing clear or explicit models and sentence starters has been recognized widely as an effective technique in developing students' speaking skills. Research by Nation & Newton (2009) shows that modeling before a speaking task helps students especially for those who are less proficient so then they can produce more accurate and confident sentences. It means, when teachers demonstrate how to use the target language beforehand, they offer step by step demonstrations that can reduce

mental effort.

As well as sentence starters, this method also plays a crucial role for learners to overcome their confusion in considering the use of grammar (Balaganapthy, 2022). By providing students with structured sentence starters, teachers help reduce the mental burden of formulating the ideas students want to express. Eventually, this kind of step-by-step support helps students build confidence gradually (Dominguez & Svihla, 2023). In other words, scaffolding fits students' abilities due to its effectiveness to boost motivation and to help them retain learning longer where it leads to students becoming more independent and achieving sustained success. However, when teachers do excessive scaffolding or continue providing assistance even when students are no longer needed, it can lead students dependent and limit their development which will encourage students to rely on the provided help (Herold & Seufert, 2025).

Encouraging the Use of Technology to Foster Independent Learning

Teacher two pointed out one of strategies mainly used to teach English speaking skills is highlighting the integration of technology which holds great promise for students to increase their speaking skills. The interview revealed that students can actually utilize modern tools such as online dictionaries, google translate, or other language learning applications which can help them learn in a much easier way. However, teacher two also stated that many students fail to utilize these modern tools instead they prefer relying on teacher guidance. It reflects those students have already had smartphones and internet access but they just often lack the skills or motivation to navigate these tools into meaningful language learning aids. Although, study from Jannah et al. (2025) supported the use of technology through Duolingo, Elsa Speak, and YouTube can improve students' pronunciation, fluency and learner engagement.

To reach the success of technology integration, it lies in structured guidance and gradual independence. This implies that teachers need to model how to use and to provide gradual practice of the digital tools to finally transfer the responsibility to students. Ultimately, when students have strong motivation and awareness of the use of the digital tools, it can influence students to develop their self-regulation and self-efficacy in deciding their self-regulated learning which can significantly improve their English proficiency (Almayez et al., 2025).

Synthesizing Approaches to Overcome the Challenges in Teaching Speaking Skills

The integration of these four strategies to overcome the challenges in teaching English speaking skills can be simplified by using music to foster a positive classroom, creating a safe space for mistakes, providing explicit linguistic scaffolding, and encouraging technology based self-directed learning. These strategies should not be viewed as separate strategies but as complementary elements that work together to support students' linguistic, emotional, and social development.

Each strategy naturally reinforces each other. For example, incorporating music helps build a positive emotion that makes students more receptive to structured scaffolding activities. At the same time, explicit scaffolding provides a linguistic foundation that allows students to apply what they have learned through technology-based practice. Through these interactions, learning can extend beyond the classroom to maximize the limited time available for speaking practice.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study explores the strategies and challenges which are encountered by teachers in teaching English speaking skills within religious senior high school bilingual classes. Through in-depth interviews with English teachers, this research has elaborated the multifaceted nature of speaking instruction. The findings confirm that teachers face a series of interrelated challenges that hinder the effectiveness of speaking instruction such as disruptive classroom dynamics, low motivation and confidence, linguistic barriers, and limited time. In response to these interconnected challenges, teachers have implemented adaptive strategies namely integrating music and song, creating psychologically safe environments, providing

explicit scaffolding, and promoting the integration of technology. This research highlights the complexity of the teachers' role, the need for curriculum reform and time, and the importance of professional development in culturally responsive technology and pedagogy.

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