

Learners' Views on Active Learning Practices in English Speaking Instruction

Hanaizatunnajah

Testiana Deni Wijayatiningsih

Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang

Jl. Kedungmundu Raya No. 18, Kota Semarang, Indonesia

testiana@unimus.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the most important yet challenging skills for learners in English as a Foreign Language contexts. Many students experience difficulties in oral communication due to speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low self-confidence, which often hinder active participation and the development of communicative competence. Active learning has been widely recognized as a student-centred approach that promotes engagement, collaboration, and meaningful language use. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perspectives on the implementation of active learning methods in English speaking classrooms and identify factors influencing their speaking performance. This study employed a qualitative research design involving senior high school and university students who had experienced English speaking instruction. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires focusing on students' learning experiences, challenges in speaking English, and perceptions of effective classroom activities. The responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and key themes. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and insufficient vocabulary are the main barriers to students' participation in speaking activities. Participants reported that active learning strategies, particularly role-play, group discussions, presentations, and contextual communication tasks, enhanced their confidence, fluency, and willingness to communicate in English. Furthermore, supportive feedback and classroom environments reduced anxiety and encouraged participation,

reinforcing the role of active learning in improving EFL speaking skills.

Keywords: active learning, EFL, student perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most important skills in learning English because it enables learners to communicate ideas, express opinions, and engage in meaningful social interactions. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, speaking proficiency is often considered a key indicator of communicative competence and language mastery. However, many learners continue to experience difficulties in speaking English despite years of formal instruction. Recent studies have reported that speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low self-confidence remain major challenges that hinder learners' oral performance and classroom participation (Aini et al., 2023; Alsariera & Yunus, 2023; Fauzi et al., 2022). Furthermore, research in EFL learning has demonstrated that learners' attitudes, emotional experiences, and learning environments significantly influence their willingness to communicate and language development (Izatunnajah & Wijayatiningsih, 2025; Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021).

To address these challenges, language educators have increasingly emphasized learner-centered instructional approaches that promote active participation and meaningful communication. One of the most widely discussed approaches is active learning, which encourages learners to engage directly in classroom activities through collaboration, interaction, reflection, and problem-solving. Active learning shifts the focus from teacher-centred instruction to student participation, allowing learners to construct knowledge through authentic experiences (Anas et al., 2022; Fadli et al., 2025). Such an approach is particularly relevant in speaking instruction because learners need frequent opportunities to practice using the language rather than merely receiving linguistic input.

In English-speaking classrooms, active learning can be implemented through role plays, discussions, presentations, debates, simulations, and other communicative activities. These practices provide learners with authentic opportunities to use English, develop fluency, and build confidence. Recent studies have demonstrated that interactive speaking environments can reduce communication anxiety and increase learner engagement by providing meaningful opportunities for language production and feedback (Ebadi et al., 2025). In addition, advances in language learning research highlight the importance of continuous speaking practice and feedback in

supporting oral language development and communicative competence (Bawut et al., 2025; Muyashoha & Sugianto, 2019).

Although active learning has been widely promoted in language education, understanding learners' perspectives remains essential for evaluating the effectiveness of classroom practices. Learners' experiences provide valuable insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of speaking. Positive perceptions of classroom activities can enhance motivation, participation, and confidence, whereas negative experiences may increase anxiety and reluctance to communicate (Dorji & Sakulwongs, 2024; Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019). Therefore, exploring learners' views can help teachers design more responsive and effective speaking instruction that aligns with students' needs and expectations.

Therefore, this study investigates learners' views on active learning practices in English-speaking instruction. Specifically, it explores learners' experiences in speaking classrooms, identifies factors influencing their participation in speaking activities, and examines their perceptions of active learning strategies that support speaking development. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for English language teachers seeking to create more engaging, supportive, and learner-centered speaking environments.

Despite the growing recognition of active learning as an effective pedagogical approach in language education, there remains a need for a deeper understanding of how learners perceive and experience active learning practices in English-speaking classrooms. Much of the existing literature has examined the effectiveness of active learning in improving language achievement, classroom engagement, and communicative competence. While these studies provide valuable evidence on learning outcomes, they often overlook learners' subjective experiences and perceptions of classroom instructional practices. Understanding learners' perspectives is particularly important because students are the primary stakeholders in the learning process, and their experiences can reveal factors that may not be visible through achievement measures alone (Athoillah, 2022; Marzuki et al., 2022).

In speaking instruction, learners' perceptions are closely related to their willingness to communicate, confidence, and participation in classroom activities. Previous studies have shown that learners are more likely to engage in speaking tasks when they perceive classroom activities as meaningful, relevant, and supportive of their learning needs (Pawlak et al., 2022). Conversely, when learners experience excessive anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, or limited opportunities for interaction, they may become reluctant to participate in speaking

activities despite possessing adequate linguistic knowledge. This suggests that the success of active learning is influenced not only by the instructional approach itself but also by how learners interpret and respond to the learning experiences provided by teachers.

Furthermore, educational contexts may shape learners' perceptions of active learning in different ways. Learners from senior high schools and universities often encounter different academic expectations, communication demands, and classroom cultures. These differences may influence how they experience speaking activities and evaluate the effectiveness of active learning practices. Therefore, examining learners' perspectives across educational levels can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing active learning in EFL speaking classrooms. Such insights are particularly relevant in contemporary language education, where learner engagement, interaction, and communicative competence have become central objectives of English instruction (Budiastuti & Wijayatiningsih, 2019, 2022).

By investigating learners' views on active learning practices in English-language instruction, this study seeks to address an important gap in the literature and to contribute empirical evidence on learners' experiences, challenges, and preferences. The findings are expected to support English language teachers in designing more responsive, engaging, and learner-centered speaking environments that foster confidence, participation, and meaningful communication in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to explore learners' views on active learning practices in English-speaking instruction. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for investigating participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of educational phenomena in depth (Cresswell & Plano, 2018). Given the study's focus on learners' perspectives regarding active learning and speaking instruction, a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to obtain rich descriptions of learners' experiences, challenges, and preferences in English-speaking classrooms.

The participants consisted of 42 university-level learners who had received English-language instruction in formal educational settings. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants based on two criteria: (1) they had participated in English-speaking classes and (2) they had experienced classroom

activities involving active learning practices, such as discussions, presentations, role plays, or collaborative speaking tasks. The inclusion of participants from different educational levels was intended to capture diverse perspectives regarding the implementation of active learning in EFL speaking classrooms.

Data were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire. Open-ended questionnaires are widely used in qualitative research because they allow participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and opinions freely while generating rich descriptive data (Mackey & Gass, 2022). In addition, this method provides flexibility and efficiency in reaching participants from different educational contexts (Rahmandani et al., 2025).

The questionnaire was developed based on concepts of communicative language teaching, active learning, learner engagement, willingness to communicate, and speaking anxiety discussed in previous studies. The instrument consisted of four main indicators.

The first indicator explored learners' experiences in English-speaking classrooms, including their feelings, confidence levels, and participation during speaking activities. The second indicator investigated barriers to speaking participation, such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and other factors affecting oral performance. The third indicator examined learners' perceptions of active learning practices, including role plays, group discussions, presentations, debates, simulations, and collaborative speaking activities. The fourth indicator focused on the perceived impact of active learning on speaking development, particularly regarding confidence, fluency, engagement, willingness to communicate, and opportunities for authentic language use.

Sample questionnaire items included: "How do you feel when participating in English-speaking activities?" "What challenges do you usually encounter when speaking English in class?" "Which classroom activities help you improve your speaking skills most effectively?", and "How do active learning activities influence your confidence and participation in speaking classes?" These questions were designed to elicit detailed reflections on learners' experiences and perceptions of active learning practices in English-speaking instruction.

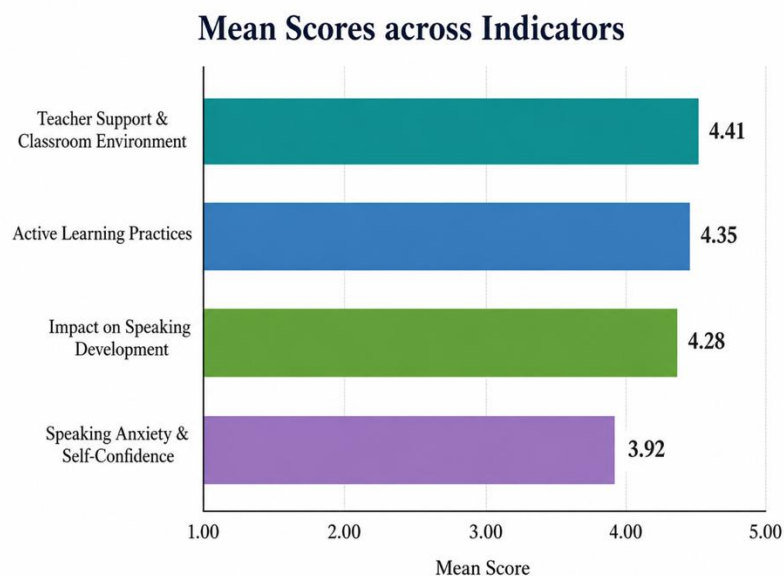
The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Mackey & Gass (2022). First, all responses were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Second, meaningful segments of data were coded and categorized according to emerging patterns. Third, related codes were grouped into broader

themes representing learners' experiences, challenges, perceptions of active learning practices, and perceived benefits for speaking development. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to existing literature on EFL speaking instruction and active learning. To enhance trustworthiness, the coding process was conducted iteratively, and the resulting themes were reviewed multiple times to ensure consistency and credibility throughout the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of questionnaire responses from 42 participants revealed four major indicators of learners' views on active learning practices in English-language instruction. To provide an overview of learners' perceptions, descriptive statistics were calculated for each indicator. The results show that participants generally perceived active learning positively, particularly regarding teacher support and classroom environment. Figure 1 present the mean scores for each indicator.

Figure 1. Mean Scores of Learners' Perceptions toward Active Learning Practices in English Speaking Instruction (N = 42)



The descriptive results indicate that learners generally held positive perceptions toward active learning practices in English-speaking instruction ($M = 4.24$). Teacher support and classroom environment received the highest mean score ($M = 4.41$), suggesting that learners highly value constructive feedback, emotional support, and positive classroom relationships. In contrast, speaking anxiety and self-confidence obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.92$),

indicating that anxiety remains a challenge despite the positive effects of active learning activities.

Speaking Anxiety and Lack of Self-Confidence

Speaking anxiety and self-confidence emerged as the most significant barriers affecting learners' participation in English speaking activities. Although the indicator achieved a moderate mean score ($M = 3.92$), qualitative responses revealed that many participants continued to struggle with nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and concerns about peer evaluation. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety remains an important issue requiring attention from teachers and curriculum designers.

One participant stated:

"Sometimes I find it difficult when I have to compose the right words or sentences to be understood because I am afraid my grammar might be wrong. I also sometimes forget how to pronounce a word correctly, and that makes me stutter when speaking."

Another participant explained:

"The anxiety that strikes makes it difficult for me to deliver sentence structures correctly, and the limited vocabulary also makes me often unconfident to speak English."

The relatively lower mean score of this indicator reflects the persistence of affective barriers in EFL speaking classrooms. These findings support the use of speaking activities (Ebadi et al., 2025; Maharani et al., 2024). Similarly, Deep, et al. (2025) emphasize that learners' emotional experiences significantly influence classroom engagement and willingness to communicate.

Learners' Preferences for Active Learning Practices

The second indicator, perceptions of active learning practices, received a high mean score ($M = 4.35$), indicating strong learner approval of interactive and student-centered activities. Participants consistently reported that role-plays, discussions, presentations, and collaborative tasks provided meaningful opportunities to practice speaking and to interact with classmates. Role play emerged as one of the most frequently preferred activities.

Participants perceived role plays as useful because they simulate real-life communication and reduce the pressure associated with formal speaking tasks. This finding aligns with Aini et al. (2023)

and Bawut et al. (2025), who argue that active learning promotes engagement by creating authentic communication opportunities. Similarly, discussion and presentation activities were viewed positively because they encouraged idea-sharing, collaborative learning, and confidence-building.

An effective class is a class where we often discuss with friends and pour it into a presentation; this can also improve our speaking skills. The high mean score suggests that learners appreciate opportunities to actively communicate rather than merely receive information from teachers.

Perceived Impact of Active Learning on Speaking Development

The third indicator, perceived impact on speaking development, obtained a high mean score ($M = 4.28$). Participants generally believed that active learning contributed positively to their confidence, fluency, willingness to communicate, and speaking performance.

Learners reported that frequent participation in communicative activities helped them become more comfortable speaking English and less afraid of making mistakes. They also perceived improvements in vocabulary use, pronunciation awareness, and interaction skills. These findings support communicative language learning theories that emphasize meaningful language use as a foundation for speaking development.

The results suggest that active learning not only increases classroom participation but also promotes long-term speaking development through repeated communication practice and peer interaction.

The Role of Teachers in Supporting Speaking Development

Teacher support and classroom environment achieved the highest mean score among all indicators ($M = 4.41$), demonstrating the central role of teachers in facilitating active learning and reducing learner anxiety.

Participants emphasized the importance of constructive feedback, encouragement, and respectful treatment during speaking activities. Many learners reported feeling more confident when teachers corrected errors supportively rather than publicly criticizing mistakes.

These findings are consistent with Bawut et al. (2025) and Muyashoha & Sugianto (2019), who found that supportive feedback increases learner motivation and engagement. Likewise, Arifah et al. (2025) reported that psychologically safe classrooms significantly reduce speaking anxiety.

All in all, the results indicate that active learning practices are most effective when combined with supportive teaching behaviors and positive classroom environments. While learners continue to experience challenges related to anxiety and self-confidence, teacher support appears to play a critical role in helping them overcome these barriers and participate more actively in English-speaking activities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored learners' views on active learning practices in English-speaking instruction and identified factors influencing their participation in speaking activities. The findings revealed that speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and limited vocabulary remain the primary barriers that hinder learners' confidence and willingness to communicate in English. Despite these challenges, learners generally expressed positive perceptions of active learning practices and recognized their contribution to speaking development.

Among the active learning practices identified, role plays, discussions, presentations, and contextual language-learning activities were perceived as the most beneficial for improving speaking skills. These activities provided learners with meaningful opportunities to practice English in authentic communication contexts, develop fluency, and build confidence through peer interaction. The findings further indicate that active learning promotes learner engagement and encourages greater participation in speaking activities than traditional teacher-centered instruction.

Another important finding concerns the significant role of teachers in facilitating effective speaking instruction. Learners emphasized the importance of constructive feedback, emotional support, and psychologically safe classroom environments in reducing anxiety and fostering confidence. The results suggest that the success of active learning implementation depends not only on the use of communicative activities but also on teachers' ability to create supportive learning environments that encourage risk-taking and language practice.

Overall, this study highlights the value of active learning in enhancing English speaking instruction by promoting engagement, confidence, and authentic communication opportunities. The findings have practical implications for English language teachers, encouraging them to incorporate more interactive, learner-centered speaking activities and to foster positive classroom environments that support learners' communicative development. Future research may involve larger participant groups and mixed-method approaches to

further examine the relationship between active learning practices, speaking performance, and learners' willingness to communicate in diverse EFL contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all participants who generously shared their experiences and perspectives for this study. Special appreciation is extended to English learners at the university levels who contributed valuable insights into active learning practices in English-language instruction. The authors also thank the lecturers for their constructive feedback and support throughout the research process. Their contributions have been invaluable in completing this study and enhancing the quality of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Aini, A. N., Salim, H., & Mashudi, E. A. (2023). Kepercayaan diri calon pendidik AUD dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris pada kegiatan English credential camp. *Murhum : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 4(1), 321–334. <https://doi.org/10.37985/murhum.v4i1.216>
- Alsariera, A. H., & Yunus, K. (2023). Issues and challenges in the use of coherence among Jordanian EFL students in writing academic essays I. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 8(2), 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol8iss2pp141-156>
- Anas, I., Basri, M., & Musdariah, A. (2022). Digital language teacher professional development from a CALL perspective: Perceived knowledge and activeness in ECCR. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 23(1), 1–21.
- Athoillah, U. (2022). The use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in teaching students' listening and speaking skills. *Jurnal Guru Dikmen Dan Dikus*, 5(1), 133–146. <http://jgdd.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/jgdd>
- Bawut, A., Murdian, F. R., & Daar, G. F. (2025). The role of corrective feedback in developing students' speaking skills in EFL conversation classes. *Journal of Education and Teaching Learning (JETL)*, 7(3), 211–224. <https://doi.org/10.51178/jetl.v7i3.2646>
- Budiastuti, R. E., & Wijayatiningsih, T. D. (2019). Analysing communication strategies of YouTube video by students of English department in Unimus. *Surakarta English and Literature Journal*, 2(1), 29–37.

- Budiastuti, R. E., & Wijayatiningsih, T. D. (2022). The application of strategic competition in EFL setting in transactional and interpersonal conversation class. *English Language & Literature International Conference*, 5(1), 635–645. <https://jurnal.unimus.ac.id/index.php/ELLIC/index>
- Cresswell, J. W., & Plano, C. V. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Deep, P. D., Ghosh, N., & Koptelov, A. V. (2025). Reducing speaking anxiety among college ESL students through artificial intelligence. *IconSES (International Conference on Social and Education Sciences)*, 139–154. www.istes.org
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8974-0997>
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0577-6252>
www.istes.org
- Dorji, N., & Sakulwongs, N. (2024). The use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) through the Cake application to improve the speaking skills of grade 6 Bhutanese ESL students. *THAITESOL JOURNAL*, 37(1), 49–71.
- Ebadi, S., Velayati, S., Ramezanzadeh, A., & Salman, A. R. (2025). Exploring the impact of AI-powered speaking tasks on EFL learners' speaking performance and anxiety: An activity theory study. *Acta Psychologica*, 259, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105391>
- Fadli, M., Faizin, & Elmayanti. (2025). Analisis strategi pembelajaran aktif dalam pembelajaran pendidikan agama Islam (PAI). *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai*, 9(2), 21825–21828.
- Fauzi, I., Hartono, R., Widhiyanto, & Pratama, H. (2022). Mengatasi *anxiety* dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris melalui pembelajaran berbasis web. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pascasarjana UNNES*, 550–556. <http://pps.unnes.ac.id/prodi/prosiding-pascasarjana-unnes/550>
- Izatunnajah, H., & Wijayatiningsih, T. D. (2025). Exploring the students' challenges and utilization of technology in their speaking strategies. *English Education Journal*, 16(4), 254–268. <https://doi.org/10.24815/eej.v16i4.50586>
- Kashinathan, S., & Abdul Aziz, A. (2021). ESL learners' challenges in speaking English in Malaysian classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(2), 983–991. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v10-i2/10355>
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2022). *Second language research*. Taylor & Francis.
- Maharani, R. S., Jayanti, S. D., & Afifi, N. (2024). Promoting self-directed learning through Netflix as a learning aid for listening and speaking: An investigation into EFL students' voices. *Journal*

- of Languages and Language Teaching*, 12(1), 212.
<https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v12i1.8377>
- Marzuki, A. G., Muthmainnah, M., Nursyam, N., Santiana, S., & Erizar, E. (2022). Utilizing smartphone-based pinterest applications in developing EFL students speaking skills in Indonesia. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 7(2), 205–209. <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v7i2.1672>
- Muyashoha, A. B., & Sugianto, A. (2019). The students' perception towards oral corrective feedback in speaking class. *Proceedings of the 3rd INACELT*, 14–29. <http://e-proceedings.iainpalangkaraya.ac.id/index.php/inacelt>
- Rahmandani, F. , Hamzah, M. R. , Handayani, T. , & Kurniawan, M. W. (2025). Integrasi pembelajaran mendalam (deep learning) dalam mewujudkan pembelajaran yang bermutu dan bermakna bagi peserta didik. *I: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan*, 4(3), 769–781. <https://doi.org/10.55606/inovasi.v4i2.4896>
- Zhang, X., & Ardasheva, Y. (2019). Sources of college EFL learners' self-efficacy in the English public speaking domain. *English for Specific Purposes*, 53, 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2018.09.004>