

Innovative Approaches to Enhancing EFL Speaking Skills: Public Speaking, Technology, Debate, and Drama

**Shallu Aulifiyya Azzahra,
Anjar Setiawan**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang
Jl. Kedungmundu Raya 18 Semarang
anjar17@unimus.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the core skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL); however, students generally face barriers such as fear, limited vocabulary, and a lack of speaking opportunities. This study explores the impact of several innovative approaches in improving speaking skills, including individual presentations, Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), debates, drama-based pedagogy, and the identification of language-learning challenges. Data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire completed by 17 respondents using a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The results show that a combination of pedagogical, performative, and technological approaches can improve fluency, confidence, and the ability to respond spontaneously. Most participants agreed that learning through digital applications, debates, and drama can improve speaking skills and enhance motivation. However, some respondents still felt anxious and struggled to generate ideas when speaking spontaneously. This study supports recent findings that multimodal approaches create more meaningful, engaging, and effective learning experiences. The implication is that educators should adopt varied and adaptive methods to support students' speaking development holistically.

Keywords: speaking skills, EFL, TELL

INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most essential communication tools in both academic and professional contexts. In today's interconnected world, proficiency in English goes beyond knowing the language; it serves as a gateway to higher education, technological resources, and international collaboration. Speaking, as one of the four core language skills, plays a particularly significant role as a medium for sharing ideas, exchanging information, and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Nevertheless, students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) frequently encounter obstacles such as limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and insufficient opportunities to practice speaking (Alhameedyeen, 2023). These challenges hinder their speaking development and can result in reduced participation in class activities and heightened communication anxiety.

To address these challenges, various teaching strategies have been implemented in EFL classrooms, including individual presentations, technology-enhanced learning, debate sessions, drama-based activities, and the identification of learner difficulties. Each of these methods aims to create a more engaging and supportive learning environment in which students can actively develop their speaking competencies. Individual presentations, for instance, provide students with structured practice in organizing ideas, improving pronunciation, and expressing themselves before an audience. At the same time, they offer teachers a valuable opportunity to monitor individual progress and identify specific areas for improvement.

Digital tools such as Duolingo, Zoom, ELSA Speak, and YouTube have demonstrated notable success in enhancing students' pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall speaking fluency (Irviana, 2020). By integrating technology into language learning, students gain access to authentic English input outside the classroom and are exposed to interactive, multimedia-rich content. These platforms allow learners to record their own voices, mimic native speakers, and receive immediate feedback, thereby boosting their confidence and motivation. Technology thus functions as a powerful supplement to classroom instruction, encouraging greater learner autonomy and self-directed study.

Debate sessions encourage students to think critically and quickly under pressure. While debates may initially heighten anxiety, they ultimately help build confidence and communication fluency through repeated exposure (Firdaus et al., 2024). Students who participate in debates learn to structure arguments logically, select

appropriate vocabulary, and respond spontaneously, skills that are directly transferable to real-world communication. Furthermore, debates foster collaborative learning and active listening, as participants must understand and counter opposing viewpoints. Drama-based pedagogy also enriches vocabulary acquisition and increases learner engagement (Mazlan et al., 2025). By performing roles and engaging in creative activities, students use English in imaginative, emotionally engaging contexts that make learning more memorable and meaningful.

Despite the numerous benefits of these approaches, EFL learners continue to struggle with various affective and cognitive barriers. Widyaningsih et al., (2025) identified inhibition, lack of ideas, low participation, and excessive reliance on the mother tongue as persistent challenges in EFL speaking development. Overcoming these obstacles requires a holistic teaching approach that considers both linguistic and psychological aspects of learning. This study, therefore, brings together five perspectives to examine the strategies and challenges involved in improving English speaking skills. Survey data collected from 17 EFL students through a Google Form questionnaire provide insights into students' perceptions of various learning strategies and their perceived impact on speaking fluency, confidence, and spontaneity. The findings aim to contribute to both the theoretical understanding and practical application of effective speaking instruction in EFL settings.

Public speaking is widely recognized as one of the most effective methods for developing English-speaking fluency in EFL contexts. When students engage in individual presentations, they are provided with structured opportunities to practice organizing and delivering their ideas before an audience. This process encourages learners to develop not only their linguistic abilities, such as vocabulary use and grammatical accuracy, but also paralinguistic skills like eye contact, gesture, and voice modulation. According to Gunawan et al., (2024), regular public speaking practice not only improves language fluency but also nurtures higher-order thinking skills and promotes greater learner independence. The experience of presenting in front of peers can progressively reduce communication anxiety and help students become more confident, articulate speakers.

The integration of digital technology into language learning has opened new avenues for EFL students to develop their speaking skills beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Applications such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak, Zoom, and YouTube provide interactive content that enables learners to practice pronunciation, expand vocabulary, and engage with authentic language in a variety of

formats. Maryani et al., (2025) highlighted that TELL promotes flexible, self-directed language learning by offering instant corrective feedback, real-life language exposure, and engaging multimedia activities. These features make technology a powerful complement to traditional instruction, supporting students in taking greater ownership of their language development and fostering consistent speaking practice.

Debate-based learning is a communicative strategy that requires students to construct and deliver arguments clearly, respond to opposing viewpoints promptly, and engage in critical thinking under time pressure. This approach encourages students to develop spontaneous speaking skills, as they must articulate well-structured ideas quickly and effectively. Sumardi, (2017) found that participation in debates significantly enhances purposeful language use and promotes cognitive engagement, even when students initially feel nervous or uncertain. Over time, repeated involvement in debate activities builds resilience and communicative confidence, enabling students to handle high-pressure speaking situations with greater ease.

Drama-based pedagogy offers a creative and emotionally engaging approach to language learning that has been shown to support vocabulary acquisition, fluency development, and increased learner participation. Through role-playing and performance activities, students are encouraged to use English in imaginative, contextually rich scenarios that mimic real-life communication. Salma & Prastikawati, (2021) emphasized that drama enables deeper language engagement by combining performative and participatory elements, making vocabulary and sentence structures more memorable. Additionally, the collaborative nature of drama fosters a supportive learning atmosphere in which students feel safe to experiment with the language, thereby reducing inhibition and enhancing overall speaking confidence (Wijayatiningsih et al., 2023).

Despite the variety of strategies available to support EFL speaking development, learners continue to face significant barriers that impede their progress. Said et al., (2024) identified inhibition, lack of ideas, low classroom participation, and overreliance on the native language as the most common challenges faced by EFL speakers. Affective factors such as fear of judgment, anxiety about making errors, and low self-confidence play a particularly prominent role in limiting students' willingness to engage in speaking activities. These psychological barriers not only reduce participation but can also slow the development of fluency and spontaneity. Addressing these challenges requires instructors to create inclusive, supportive

classroom environments that validate learners' efforts and encourage risk-taking in communication.

METHOD

This research adopted a descriptive approach that combined a systematic literature review with a survey-based data collection method. Five scholarly articles focusing on the development of English-speaking skills were selected and reviewed to identify the most effective teaching strategies documented in recent research. These included public speaking, technology-enhanced language learning, debate-based learning, drama-based pedagogy, and the analysis of EFL speaking challenges. The insights gathered from this review served as the conceptual foundation for constructing the research instrument.

A structured questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and distributed online to EFL students on a voluntary basis. The instrument consisted of ten Likert-scale statements (rated 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree), designed to measure students' perceptions of each teaching strategy and their self-reported challenges in speaking English. A total of 17 respondents participated in the survey. The data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentage distribution of responses for each item, and the results were interpreted in relation to the themes identified in the literature review. This approach allowed for a clear overview of students' views without seeking causal relationships between variables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The survey was completed by 17 EFL students. The following table presents the percentage distribution of responses for each of the ten questionnaire items, based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Table 1. Survey Results: Student Perceptions of Innovative Speaking Strategies (n = 17)

Statement	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. Public speaking activities help me speak English more fluently and confidently.	0%	5.9%	23.5%	35.3%	23.5%
2. Using digital applications such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak, or YouTube helps	0%	0%	29.4%	29.4%	29.4%

	me pronunciation vocabulary.	improve and					
3.	Participating in debates trains me to think quickly and organize my arguments logically in English.	0%	0%	47.1%	17.6%	23.5%	
4.	Acting in drama activities makes me more expressive and helps me understand how to use English in real contexts.	0%	5.9%	23.5%	41.2%	17.6%	
5.	I often feel nervous or afraid when I have to speak English in front of others.	11.8%	0%	23.5%	29.4%	35.3%	
6.	I sometimes lack ideas or vocabulary when I need to speak spontaneously in English.	0%	0%	23.5%	41.2%	23.5%	
7.	The use of various innovative strategies (such as debates, drama, and technology) makes speaking activities more engaging.	0%	5.9%	35.3%	29.4%	23.5%	
8.	Integrating technology with speaking practice helps me learn and practice speaking independently outside the classroom.	0%	5.9%	23.5%	29.4%	35.3%	
9.	My teacher or lecturer provides positive feedback and support that helps me overcome speaking difficulties.	0%	0%	35.3%	35.3%	23.5%	
10.	Overall, the use of innovative methods has improved my English speaking ability.	0%	0%	23.5%	47.1%	17.6%	

Public Speaking Activities

The results for item 1 show that the majority of respondents, approximately 58.8%, rated their agreement at level 4 or 5, indicating that public speaking activities noticeably helped them speak English more fluently and confidently. Only 23.5% responded at level 3 (neutral), and a small proportion (5.9%) indicated low agreement. These findings suggest that individual presentations are perceived as a meaningful strategy for developing speaking fluency. This is consistent with Purnami (2024), who argued that public speaking fosters not only linguistic competence but also self-directed learning habits. When students are regularly given the opportunity to present, they gradually become more accustomed to organizing their thoughts, controlling their delivery, and managing nervousness in front of an audience.

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning

Item 2 revealed a notably positive response: 29.4% of students gave a rating of 5, and another 29.4% rated it at 4, showing that digital tools such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak, and YouTube are widely seen as useful for improving pronunciation and vocabulary. No respondents gave a rating of 1 or 2, while 29.4% were neutral. These results reinforce the findings of Jannah et al. (2025), who noted that TELL platforms support autonomous and flexible language development. The interactive and multimodal nature of these applications allows students to practice speaking at their own pace, which is particularly beneficial for students who feel less confident speaking in classroom settings.

Debate-Based Learning

Responses to item 3 showed a somewhat different pattern compared to other strategies. A large proportion, 47.1%, rated this item at level 3 (neutral), suggesting a more mixed perception of debates as a tool for developing quick thinking and logical argumentation. However, 23.5% still gave a high rating of 5, and 17.6% rated it at 4. The relatively high neutrality may reflect the initial difficulty students experience in debate activities, particularly those involving spontaneous argumentation in a second language. These findings align with Mulyadi et al., (2023), who acknowledged that while debates are cognitively demanding, they are effective in building purposeful language use over time. Educators may need to scaffold debate activities progressively to build student confidence before moving to more complex tasks.

Drama-Based Pedagogy

For item 4, the results showed strong positive perceptions of drama-based activities. Approximately 41.2% of respondents rated this item at level 4, indicating that acting exercises help them become more expressive and understand how to use English in real-life contexts. An additional 17.6% rated it at 5, while 23.5% were at level 3. These findings are consistent with (Kristianti et al., 2023), who emphasized that drama-based pedagogy facilitates richer engagement with the language through creative and participatory performance. Role-playing and dramatization appear to make vocabulary and expressions more accessible, as students encounter them in emotionally meaningful and context-rich scenarios.

Speaking Anxiety and Spontaneity Challenges

Items 5 and 6 addressed the affective and cognitive challenges students face in EFL speaking. For item 5 regarding nervousness when speaking in front of others, 35.3% of respondents gave the highest rating of 5, indicating strong agreement that they often feel anxious. An additional 29.4% rated it at 4, and 23.5% at 3. Only 11.8% gave a rating of 1. This suggests that anxiety is a prevalent concern across the group. Similarly, item 6 showed that 41.2% of students rated their difficulty in generating ideas during spontaneous speech at level 4, and 23.5% at level 5. These findings reflect the challenges described by Setiawan & Mulyadi, (2021), who identified inhibition and lack of ideas as two of the most common obstacles for EFL learners. The data suggest that affective barriers remain significant even when students are engaged in varied instructional activities.

Engagement Through Innovative Strategies

Items 7 and 8 explored students' overall perceptions of innovative strategies. For item 7 on whether a combination of debates, drama, and technology makes speaking activities more engaging, 29.4% rated it at 4 and 23.5% at 5, with the majority neutral at 35.3%. For item 8 on whether technology integration supports independent speaking practice outside class, 35.3% gave a rating of 5, and 29.4% rated it at 4. These results indicate that while students generally find innovative methods engaging, technology in particular is seen as a strong enabler of autonomous learning. This is in line with the broader TELL literature, which highlights technology's role in extending language learning beyond formal classroom boundaries.

Teacher Feedback and Overall Improvement

Item 9 focused on teacher feedback, with 35.3% rating it at 4 and 23.5% at 5, while 35.3% were neutral. This suggests that while teacher support is valued, its perceived impact may vary depending on the type and consistency of feedback provided. Constructive feedback from instructors helps students identify specific weaknesses and set goals for improvement, ultimately building their confidence for future speaking tasks. Finally, item 10 asked about overall improvement resulting from innovative methods: 47.1% of respondents rated it at 4, and 17.6% at 5, with no respondents giving a rating of 1 or 2. This strongly suggests that students recognize the cumulative benefit of multimodal teaching approaches. Taken together, these findings support the view that combining public speaking, technology, debate, and drama produces a more comprehensive and effective learning experience than any single method alone.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that improving EFL speaking skills requires the implementation of diverse and complementary teaching strategies. The survey findings indicate that public speaking activities, technology-enhanced language learning, debate-based learning, and drama-based pedagogy are all perceived positively by students as tools for developing fluency, vocabulary, and speaking confidence. Among these, technology integration and drama-based activities received particularly strong ratings, suggesting that students find multimodal and experiential approaches especially effective. The combination of structured practice through presentations, creative performance through drama, critical engagement through debates, and flexible learning through digital tools creates a well-rounded instructional framework.

Despite the overall positive perceptions, the data also reveal that anxiety and difficulties with spontaneous speaking remain persistent concerns for a significant number of students. Items related to nervousness and lack of ideas when speaking spontaneously received notably high agreement ratings, indicating that affective and cognitive barriers continue to challenge learners even when innovative methods are employed. This highlights the need for instructors not only to vary their teaching strategies but also to provide emotional support and create psychologically safe learning environments where students feel comfortable taking risks in communication.

The findings of this study suggest that no single method is sufficient on its own. Rather, a multimodal approach, one that

integrates pedagogical, performative, and technological elements, offers the most comprehensive support for EFL speaking development. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples and may benefit from employing mixed-methods designs that combine survey data with classroom observation and learner interviews. Such approaches would provide deeper insight into how individual differences, learning contexts, and instructional quality interact to shape speaking outcomes. Ultimately, ongoing investment in varied and adaptive teaching methods is essential to helping EFL learners communicate with greater confidence and effectiveness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Study Program of English Language Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang, for its invaluable support and financial contribution to this research. This support has played a significant role in facilitating the successful completion and dissemination of the study. The author also extends sincere appreciation to all colleagues and individuals whose assistance, encouragement, and constructive contributions enriched the research process.

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