

The Implementation of the Direct Method in Teaching Speaking at University Level

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is important in communicative competence. Although the students have studied English for years, their opportunities to use it actively, especially in speaking, aren't good. In many classrooms, the focus is on grammar, reading comprehension, and writing tasks. This study aims to investigate the implementation of the Direct Method in teaching speaking skills at the university level. It focuses on how English lecturers apply the principles of the Direct Method in their class, how students respond to this method, and what challenges arise during the teaching and learning process. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness and practicality of using the Direct Method in higher education settings, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language). A qualitative descriptive research design was used in this study, aiming to provide a detailed and accurate description of how the Direct Method is implemented at the university level. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with both lecturers and students, and an analysis of relevant teaching documents, including lesson plans and speaking activity materials. This approach allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the teaching process, student engagement, and the challenges faced in the application of the Direct Method. The results revealed that the Direct Method was effectively implemented through various interactive activities such as question-answer sessions, picture descriptions, and role-plays. Students demonstrated improved fluency, confidence, and vocabulary use. The study also identified some obstacles, such as students' low initial proficiency and limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

Keywords: direct method; speaking skill; university

INTRODUCTION

English speaking skills is one of the most important competencies that students are expected to master, especially at the university level. It plays a crucial role in academic communication, international collaboration, and career development. However, in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, such as Indonesia, speaking remains a challenging skill for university students. Despite learning English for several years, many students still struggle with fluency, confidence, and pronunciation. This situation is often caused by traditional teaching methods that prioritize grammar and translation, rather than active communication. As a result, students may develop passive knowledge of English but fail to use it effectively in spoken interaction.

Moreover, the use of the first language (L1) in English classes further limits students' exposure to and practice in real-time English communication. When teachers frequently switch to the students' native language to explain vocabulary or grammar, students become dependent on translation and fail to develop the ability to think in English. This reduces the opportunities for learners to be immersed in the target language environment, which is essential for improving speaking skills such as fluency, spontaneity, and pronunciation. As a result, students often understand English theoretically but struggle to use it orally in authentic situations.

In recent years, the Direct Method has been recognized as one of the effective approaches to improve speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Numerous studies have investigated its application in different educational settings, especially at the primary and secondary levels. For instance, Agustina (2019) explored the implementation of the Direct Method in junior high school and found that it helped students improve vocabulary retention and oral fluency. Similarly, Rahmawati & Hidayah (2021) examined the method in a vocational high school setting, showing that frequent speaking practice helped reduce students' anxiety and hesitation in speaking English. However, these studies primarily focused on younger learners, where classroom dynamics, learning motivation, and curriculum goals differ significantly from those in higher education.

Meanwhile, studies that focus on university-level learners remain limited. One relevant study by Nuraini (2020) investigated communicative approaches in speaking classes at the university level but did not specifically address the Direct Method. Furthermore, Putri (2022) conducted a study on the use of the Direct Method in an English course for adults, but the study focused more on vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation accuracy rather than on overall classroom implementation and student responses. These studies reveal that while the Direct Method is widely acknowledged, its practical application in university EFL classrooms, especially in Indonesian contexts, has not been deeply examined.

Another noticeable gap is the lack of qualitative descriptive research that explores how lecturers implement the Direct Method, how students respond to it, and what challenges occur during classroom interactions. Most previous research adopted quantitative designs with test-based measurements of students' speaking ability (e.g., pre-test/post-test), while the instructional process itself including teacher strategies, real-time language use, and student engagement which remains underexplored.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by providing a qualitative descriptive account of the implementation of the Direct Method in a university speaking class. It focuses on three important aspects: (1) How lecturers apply the Direct Method in classroom practice, (2) How students respond to the use of the method, and (3) What challenges during the implementation.

This research offers several **new contributions** to the field of EFL speaking instruction. First, **University-Level Context** that provides insight into the application of the Direct Method in **Indonesian university classrooms**, an area rarely explored in previous research. Second, **focus on the Instructional Process** rather than measuring speaking outcomes, this study explores **how** the method is implemented, providing practical examples of activities, teacher-student interaction patterns, and classroom strategies. Third, **Student Perspective** which includes **students' responses and reflections**, adding depth to our understanding of how learners experience the Direct Method in higher education. Forth, **Challenges and Pedagogical Recommendations** which the study identifies **real classroom challenges** and provides **practical suggestions** for lecturers who wish to adopt more communicative methods like the Direct Method. An the last, by using a **qualitative descriptive design**, the study adds rich contextual data that can help shape **teaching reforms and teacher training programs**, particularly in EFL tertiary institutions.

Approach	Focus	Strength	Weakness
CLT	Communication in real-life context	Student engagement	May neglect grammar
TBLT	Language use through tasks	Fluency and interaction	Task > language risk
ALM	Repetition and structure	Pronunciation, accuracy	Lacks real communication
Tech Tools	Self-recording, online talks	Motivation and autonomy	Tech-dependent
Direct Method	Full target language use	Fluency and spontaneous speech	Challenging for beginners

While numerous efforts have been made to improve speaking skills which giving space from communicative techniques to tech integration. **Few studies and applications focus specifically on the Direct Method at the university level**, especially in Indonesian EFL classrooms. This gap highlights the need to explore how the Direct Method can be implemented effectively in higher education to enhance spontaneous and fluent English use.

The Direct Method emphasizes exclusive use of the target language in class, promoting direct associations between meaning and language without translation. It encourages spontaneous speaking and listening through question-and-answer activities, modeling, and visual aids. Agustina (2019) applied the Direct Method in a junior high school in Indonesia and found a significant increase in students' vocabulary retention and fluency. However, its use at the university level, particularly in Indonesia, is still rare. Most existing studies focus on younger learners, and there is limited research investigating how university lecturers apply the Direct Method, how students respond to it, and what challenges arise in higher education contexts.

Method	Limitation
ALM	Repetitive; lacks real communication
CLT	Weak in pronunciation/fluency focus
TBLT	Risk of task focus over language use
Tech Tools	Access and digital literacy issues
Translation-based	Limits immersion and spontaneity
Direct Method	Rarely applied or studied in universities

Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)

ALM uses repetitive drills and pattern practice to develop speaking habits. Nugroho (2017) noted improvements in pronunciation and grammar accuracy. Nevertheless, the method often lacks spontaneity and real communication.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT emphasizes interaction and authentic communication. Yuliana (2018) found that CLT improved student engagement and confidence in speaking activities. However, lower-proficiency students often struggle to participate fully without sufficient linguistic scaffolding.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT encourages language use through real-world tasks. Sari and Putra (2020) reported improvements in fluency and collaboration. Yet, without careful task design, students may focus more on completing the task than using language accurately and meaningfully.

Technology Integration in Speaking Instruction

Tools such as video blogs and language exchange apps have been used to enhance motivation and provide flexible speaking practice. Rahman and Fitria (2021) observed that video recording increased student self-awareness. However, unequal access to technology remains a barrier in many institutions.

The Direct Method (DM)

The Direct Method emphasizes immersion in the target language without using translation. Agustina (2019) showed that DM enhanced fluency and vocabulary retention among junior high school students. Despite its potential, its application in higher education, particularly in Indonesian universities, is still limited and under-researched.

These shortcomings point to the need for an **in-depth study** on how to apply the **Direct Method** more effectively at the university level where students are expected to achieve a higher level of fluency and independence. Your study responds to this need by examining real classroom implementation, lecturer strategies, student reactions, and classroom challenges using a qualitative research. The main argument of this study is the implementation of the Direct Method in university-level English speaking classes can significantly enhance students' speaking performance by increasing their fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and confidence. Unlike traditional methods that rely heavily on grammar instruction and the use of the first language (L1), the Direct Method encourages full immersion in English, real-time communication, and active student participation. When appropriately adapted to the university context, it provides students with meaningful speaking practice and a more natural learning environment.

This study claims that, despite challenges such as students' initial resistance and lecturers' need for adequate training, the Direct Method proves to be an effective approach to improving communicative

competence in higher education EFL settings. Although English has been taught for many years at the university level, many students still struggle to speak confidently and fluently. This is often due to the continued use of traditional teaching approaches that prioritize grammar translation or passive learning, where speaking opportunities are limited and the first language (L1) is frequently used as a medium of instruction. As a result, students lack the real-time practice necessary for developing natural communication skills in English.

The Direct Method addresses this issue by requiring the exclusive use of English in the classroom, encouraging students to think and respond directly in the target language. It emphasizes oral interaction, pronunciation drills, question-and-answer techniques, and contextual vocabulary — all of which help students internalize language structures more naturally. In the university setting, where learners are expected to use English in academic presentations, discussions, and real-life scenarios, the Direct Method creates a learning environment that mirrors real-world communication. It pushes students out of their comfort zones and fosters active language production, which is essential for improving speaking competence.

Speaking is one of the important language skills that reflects a learner's ability to use English for real communication. Exactly in teaching learning process at Tribakti University. However, in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, including at the university level, students often lack speaking fluency, confidence, and correct pronunciation despite having studied English for years. One of the main reasons is the dominance of traditional, grammar-focused teaching methods and the frequent use of students' first language (L1) during English classes, which limit students' exposure to and practice in real-time English communication.

In response to these challenges, language educators have explored various teaching methods that prioritize speaking practice. One such approach is the Direct Method, which emerged in the late 19th century as a reaction against the Grammar-Translation Method. The Direct Method emphasizes exclusive use of the target language (English), oral interaction, and learning vocabulary and grammar in context. It was originally developed for teaching modern languages in Europe and later adapted for ESL/EFL classrooms around the world. Although the Direct Method has been applied successfully at the primary and secondary education levels, its implementation in university-level English instruction remains limited and under-researched, particularly in non-English speaking countries. Given the increasing need for university students to communicate fluently in academic and professional settings, there is a growing interest in exploring how this method can be used to improve speaking performance in higher education.

The research location in Tribakti University was selected because it presents a unique, interesting, and urgent context for examining the implementation of the Direct Method in teaching speaking skills at the university level. The chosen university actively incorporates English instruction as part of its core curriculum; however, initial observations and informal interviews revealed that many students continue to face difficulties in speaking fluently and confidently. This highlights an urgent need to explore more communicative and immersive teaching methods.

What makes this location particularly interesting is that some lecturers have recently begun experimenting with the Direct Method in their speaking classes—an approach that is still relatively rare in higher education institutions, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts like Indonesia. This creates a valuable opportunity to study a relatively uncommon pedagogical practice in a real-world setting, where its practical application, student responses, and instructional challenges can be closely observed.

Furthermore, the university represents a typical EFL learning environment where students share common barriers to oral communication, such as over-reliance on their first language (L1) and limited exposure to spoken English outside the classroom. These factors make it a suitable and strategic site for investigating how the Direct Method can be used to improve speaking skills in higher education. The findings from this setting may also provide insights that are relevant and transferable to similar institutions

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation of the Direct Method in teaching speaking skills at the university level. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed and in-depth examination of classroom interactions, teaching practices, student responses, and the challenges encountered during the learning process. Rather than focusing on numerical data or statistical outcomes, this type of research seeks to understand human behaviour and educational phenomena from the perspective of those involved.

The descriptive nature of the study means that the researcher aims to observe, describe, and interpret the use of the Direct Method in its natural classroom setting without manipulating any variables. Through direct observations, interviews with lecturers and students, and analysis of related documents such as lesson plans or speaking tasks, the research captures rich, contextual data that reflect real classroom dynamics.

This research design is appropriate because the objective is not to measure the effectiveness of the Direct Method quantitatively, but to understand how the method is implemented, how it affects learners' speaking development, and what factors support or hinder its use. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for language educators, curriculum developers, and researchers who are interested in communicative language teaching strategies in EFL university settings.

To gain data collection from a comprehensive understanding of how the Direct Method, it is implemented in teaching speaking skills at the university level, this study employed **three primary data collection methods: classroom observation, interviews, and document analysis.**

First, **classroom observation** was conducted to see how the Direct Method was applied during the teaching and learning process. The researcher observed real-time classroom interactions, focusing on the strategies used by the lecturer, students' participation, use of the target language, and speaking activities. Field notes were taken to record relevant behaviors, instructional patterns, and classroom atmosphere. Second, **semi-structured interviews** were carried out with both lecturers and students. These interviews aimed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward the use of the Direct Method in speaking classes. Open-ended questions allowed for deeper insights and flexibility in the responses, making it possible to identify themes and challenges that may not be visible through observation alone. Third, **document analysis** involved reviewing teaching materials, lesson plans, speaking assignments, and assessment rubrics used during the study. This helped verify how the method was integrated into the curriculum and whether it aligned with the intended principles of the Direct Method.

By using multiple data sources, this study ensured **data triangulation**, which enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings.

This study used **qualitative data analysis** techniques to process and interpret the information collected from observations, interviews, and document analysis. The researcher followed the steps of **Miles and Huberman's interactive model**, which includes **data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.**

1. **Data reduction** involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing the raw data obtained from field notes, transcripts, and documents. Irrelevant or repetitive information was removed, and the remaining data were coded into categories related to the research focus, such as teaching strategies, student responses, and challenges.
2. **Data display** was carried out by arranging the categorized data in the form of matrices, charts, or narrative descriptions to help visualize patterns and relationships. This step helped the researcher compare findings from different data sources and identify emerging themes.
3. **Conclusion drawing and verification** were done continuously throughout the research process. The researcher interpreted the findings, checked for consistency, and verified them through **triangulation**—by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documents to ensure validity.

By following this process, the analysis remained systematic, grounded in the data, and reflective of the real teaching-learning context.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data in this qualitative study, several strategies were applied based on the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four

criteria are commonly used in qualitative research to replace the traditional concepts of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

1. **Credibility** was established through **data triangulation**—collecting information from multiple sources such as classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The consistency of data across these sources helped strengthen the accuracy of the findings. In addition, **member checking** was used by returning interview summaries to participants for verification and clarification.
2. **Transferability** was addressed by providing a **thick description** of the research context, participants, and classroom setting. This enables readers to determine whether the findings can be applied to other similar contexts.
3. **Dependability** was ensured through a clear and detailed explanation of the research procedures, including data collection, coding, and analysis. An audit trail was maintained to document every step of the research process.
4. **Confirmability** was enhanced by maintaining objectivity and neutrality during data collection and analysis. Researcher bias was minimized through reflective notes and peer discussion.

By applying these strategies, the study guarantees that the findings are not only accurate and grounded in the data, but also applicable and trustworthy for other educators and researchers.

FINDINGS

Speaking is a crucial component of language proficiency, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where learners must develop not only grammatical accuracy but also communicative competence. According to Brown (2007), effective speaking instruction should engage learners in real communication and reduce their dependence on the first language. However, in many university classrooms, speaking activities are still limited, with an overemphasis on grammar and translation-based teaching methods.

One alternative that addresses this issue is the Direct Method, a language teaching approach that promotes immersive language use by avoiding the learners' first language entirely. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) state, the Direct Method emphasizes the use of the target language for everyday communication, vocabulary through demonstration, and inductive grammar instruction. In theory, this method should foster more natural speaking practice, increase learners' confidence, and improve pronunciation. Despite its potential, the application of the Direct Method at the university level—particularly in EFL settings—remains under-explored. Many instructors face institutional, cultural, or practical challenges in fully implementing this method. Thus, this study seeks to investigate how the Direct Method is applied in teaching speaking at the university level, and how its use aligns with communicative teaching principles.

The data in this study were collected using three primary techniques: classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The purpose of data presentation is to describe the findings clearly and systematically, allowing readers to understand how the Direct Method was implemented in the classroom and how it influenced the students' speaking skills.

Classroom observation notes are presented to highlight how lecturers conducted speaking lessons using the Direct Method. This includes how they avoided the use of the first language, used real-life objects or situations to introduce vocabulary, and engaged students in repetitive speaking activities. Key teaching practices and classroom interactions are described narratively and, where appropriate, supported by direct quotes or observation transcripts.

Interview data from lecturers and students are categorized into thematic patterns, such as teaching strategies, student responses, perceived benefits, and challenges faced. These themes are presented with selected quotations from participants to enrich the analysis and provide authentic insight into their experiences.

Document analysis includes lesson plans and syllabi, which are examined to understand the intended learning outcomes and how they align with the principles of the Direct Method. Altogether, the data presentation section provides a comprehensive and structured view of how the Direct Method functions in the real classroom context and its effects on students' speaking performance.

Student Responses and Participation

In addition to lecturer strategies, this study also investigated how students responded to the implementation of the Direct Method in speaking classes. The data from classroom observations and student interviews revealed that most students showed increased engagement and active participation during lessons conducted entirely in English. During observations, students were seen responding to questions, repeating vocabulary, and participating in role-play activities without relying on their first language. Although some students initially displayed hesitation or lack of confidence, over time, their speaking fluency and willingness to communicate improved. Many students expressed that the English-only environment pushed them to think more quickly and to use the language spontaneously, which they felt was beneficial for their learning.

Interview results further confirmed that students appreciated the immersive nature of the Direct Method, particularly in helping them remember new vocabulary and practice pronunciation. Some students mentioned that they found it challenging at first, especially when they did not understand instructions, but they gradually adapted with the help of gestures, visual aids, and context clues provided by the lecturer. These findings indicate that, despite initial difficulties, students responded positively to the Direct Method and showed improvement in confidence and oral communication skills when consistently exposed to English in the classroom.

Lecturer Challenges in Implementing the Direct Method

While the Direct Method offers several advantages in promoting speaking skills, data collected from lecturer interviews and classroom observations also revealed several challenges faced during its implementation. These challenges were both pedagogical and contextual in nature. One of the most commonly reported challenges was students' varying levels of English proficiency. Lecturers noted that in mixed-ability classes, some students struggled to follow instructions or participate actively in English-only interactions. As a result, lecturers often had to slow down their speech, simplify instructions, or use gestures and visuals extensively to ensure comprehension. Another challenge involved students' habitual reliance on their first language. Even though the Direct Method discourages any use of L1, lecturers found it difficult to completely eliminate it, especially when clarifying complex concepts or addressing students' confusion. Some students also lacked confidence and were afraid of making mistakes when speaking in English, which affected their participation.

Classroom management was also mentioned as a concern. Large class sizes made it difficult for lecturers to give individual attention or conduct pair-work speaking tasks effectively. In some cases, institutional expectations or rigid syllabi limited the freedom to fully apply communicative and immersive methods like the Direct Method. Despite these difficulties, most lecturers believed the benefits outweighed the challenges, particularly in terms of improving students' fluency and encouraging real-time communication.

Teaching Strategies Used in Applying the Direct Method

Through classroom observations and lecturer interviews, this study identified several key strategies used to apply the Direct Method effectively in teaching speaking at the university level. Although lecturers adhered to the principle of using English as the sole medium of instruction, they also adapted the method to fit the classroom context and learners' needs.

One common strategy was the use of visual aids—pictures, real objects (realia), gestures, and multimedia—to explain vocabulary and concepts without translating into the students' first language. This helped students associate words directly with meanings in English, fostering vocabulary retention and comprehension. Another widely used approach was repetition and pattern practice. Lecturers often give example about a sentence or question multiple times, then invited students to repeat, substitute, or answer in various forms. This drilling technique was useful for building automatic speaking habits and improving pronunciation. Interactive activities, such as dialogues, role-plays, and question-answer games, were also central to the classroom. These activities required students to use English in simulated real-life situations, increasing fluency and confidence. Pair work and group work further supported peer learning and reduced anxiety among less proficient students. In adapting the Direct Method, lecturers demonstrated flexibility—

maintaining its core philosophy while modifying delivery based on students' proficiency levels and classroom dynamics.

Student response is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of any teaching method, particularly in speaking-focused instruction where active participation, confidence, and motivation are essential. According to Harmer (2007), language learners are more likely to succeed when they are engaged, encouraged, and feel a sense of progress in using the target language. In this regard, the Direct Method, with its emphasis on immersive, communicative language learning, is designed to foster a more interactive and student-centred environment. The Direct Method encourages students to think and communicate directly in the target language without translation, which can reduce reliance on L1 and improve fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). It also uses real-life situations, repetitive speaking drills, and contextualized vocabulary instruction to make speaking more natural. However, student reactions to this approach can vary significantly, especially in university settings where learners may have different levels of motivation, anxiety, or learning preferences. Some students may embrace the challenge of learning through full English exposure, while others may experience frustration or discomfort, particularly in the early stages. Therefore, understanding how students perceive and respond to the Direct Method in speaking classes is essential. This leads to the formulation of the second problem: What are the students' responses to the implementation of the Direct Method in teaching speaking at the university level?

Student Responses

The findings from classroom observations and student interviews revealed diverse but generally positive responses to the implementation of the Direct Method in university speaking classes. Many students expressed that being exposed to English throughout the lesson helped them improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking. The immersive nature of the Direct Method, which encouraged students to use English in everyday classroom interactions, was perceived as both challenging and beneficial. During classroom observations, students showed increasing participation over time. Initially, some appeared hesitant and reluctant to speak, particularly those with lower proficiency levels. However, as they became more familiar with the method and the learning environment, their willingness to engage in dialogue, answer questions, and take part in role-plays improved significantly.

Interview data highlighted that student appreciated the use of real objects, visual aids, and gestures, which helped them understand new vocabulary and sentence patterns without relying on translation. They also noted that constant speaking practice helped them think faster in English and reduced their fear of making mistakes. Nevertheless, a small number of students reported difficulties, especially in understanding instructions or complex vocabulary without the use of their first language. Despite these challenges, most students acknowledged that the Direct Method pushed them to be more active and helped develop their speaking competence over time.

Students' Behavioral and Emotional Responses

In addition to verbal feedback, students' behavioral changes during class activities provided deeper insight into their responses to the Direct Method. Observation data indicated a gradual shift in student engagement—from passive listening to more active involvement in speaking tasks. In early sessions, many students avoided eye contact, hesitated to respond, and used minimal English. However, as the Direct Method was consistently applied, students appeared more relaxed, initiating conversations, volunteering answers, and even correcting their own or peers' mistakes. Students expressed in interviews that the frequent speaking opportunities reduced their anxiety and improved their sense of achievement. Some stated that, although they initially feared embarrassment or making errors, repeated exposure to English-only instruction helped them overcome these fears. One student shared, *"I used to be scared of speaking, but now I feel more confident because we practice every day."* Another student explained that the absence of L1 made them "think faster" and "pay more attention to meaning, not just grammar." Nevertheless, a few students admitted that their motivation varied depending on the topic or the activity type. Interactive methods like role plays and games were preferred over repetitive drills. These findings suggest that while the Direct Method generally fostered improved speaking performance and classroom confidence, student engagement was influenced by both the design of the activities and individual learning preferences.

Variation in Student Responses Based on Language Proficiency

The study also found that students' responses to the Direct Method varied significantly based on their English proficiency level. High-proficiency students responded more favorably and adapted more

quickly to the English-only environment. They actively engaged in classroom discussions, participated confidently in speaking tasks, and expressed enthusiasm for the immersive experience. These students reported that the method challenged them to improve their fluency and encouraged spontaneous communication. In contrast, students with lower proficiency levels initially showed signs of discomfort and hesitation. Observation revealed that they often remained silent during open-ended speaking tasks and relied heavily on non-verbal communication or peer assistance. During interviews, some admitted that they felt nervous or confused when they could not understand the teacher's explanations. A few expressed concerns that they were "left behind" when others answered quickly in English. Despite these initial struggles, many low-proficiency students reported gradual improvement. With consistent exposure and teacher support—such as modeling, slowing down speech, and using gestures—they became more confident in expressing themselves, even with limited vocabulary. One student noted, *"At first I didn't understand anything, but now I can talk a little in English without thinking too much."* These findings highlight the importance of differentiated support in implementing the Direct Method effectively, ensuring that students at all levels can benefit and build their speaking skills progressively.

Perceptions of Classroom Atmosphere and Teacher Roles

An important aspect of students' responses to the Direct Method was how they perceived the classroom atmosphere and the role of the teacher. Many students described the learning environment as more dynamic, interactive, and engaging compared to traditional grammar-translation methods. They noted that classes felt "more alive" and "less stressful," especially when the teacher used visual cues, realia, and gestures to aid comprehension.

Observational data supported this perception. Teachers using the Direct Method maintained high energy levels, used frequent questioning, and encouraged active participation from all students. The teacher was often seen not just as a source of knowledge, but as a facilitator of communication, guiding students to use English in context rather than focusing solely on error correction.

In interviews, students appreciated this shift in teacher roles. One student mentioned, *"Our teacher doesn't just explain, she makes us speak and learn from doing."* Another shared that the teacher's patience and encouragement helped them gain confidence in speaking without fear of making mistakes. However, a few students expressed concerns about the fast-paced nature of the lessons. Some suggested that occasionally mixing in brief explanations in their first language would help clarify difficult concepts without disrupting the English immersion. Overall, the data indicated that the Direct Method created a more communicative, student-centred classroom where the teacher played a crucial role in maintaining motivation and facilitating spoken interaction.

Lecturer Challenges in Implementing the Direct Method

Although the Direct Method offers several advantages for enhancing speaking skills—such as increased student interaction, vocabulary acquisition through context, and improved pronunciation—it is not without its challenges, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university settings. Theoretically, this method demands a high level of commitment from both teachers and students to sustain an English-only environment. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), successful implementation of the Direct Method requires teachers to possess strong classroom management skills, spontaneous language abilities, and creative instructional techniques to maintain engagement without reverting to the first language (L1).

In practice, however, many university lecturers encounter limitations when applying this method. Factors such as large class sizes, varying student proficiency levels, and limited institutional support can hinder the method's effectiveness. Harmer (2007) points out that teachers may feel pressured by curriculum demands, time constraints, and exam-oriented systems that prioritize grammar mastery over communicative fluency. Additionally, in many contexts where English is not the native or dominant language, teachers themselves may face linguistic or pedagogical limitations that reduce their confidence in applying the method fully. This study explores these real-world barriers by focusing on how lecturers navigate and adapt the Direct Method in their university classrooms, and what strategies they use to overcome the challenges while still aiming to build students' speaking competence.

Institutional and Environmental Challenges

The data obtained through in-depth interviews and classroom observations highlighted several institutional and environmental challenges that university lecturers face in implementing the Direct Method for teaching speaking skills. A primary concern raised by lecturers was large class sizes, often exceeding 30 students per session. This made it difficult for instructors to give each student ample speaking time, monitor performance, or maintain consistent interaction—all of which are core elements of the Direct Method. Lecturers noted that, in such conditions, pair work or individual speaking tasks often became chaotic or superficial. Time constraints were also frequently mentioned. With limited classroom hours dedicated specifically to speaking, lecturers struggled to create immersive English environments. The Direct Method requires extended periods for modelling, repetition, and practice, which were not always feasible within the rigid academic schedules. One lecturer remarked, *“We only have 90 minutes a week. That’s barely enough to introduce vocabulary, let alone practice it in conversation.”*

In addition, lack of resources—such as multimedia tools, visual aids, and Direct Method-specific materials—posed a challenge. Many classrooms were equipped only with basic whiteboards, forcing lecturers to rely heavily on verbal explanation and improvisation. These institutional and logistical limitations significantly impacted the consistent and effective application of the Direct Method, despite lecturers’ willingness to adopt communicative strategies in their classrooms.

Pedagogical and Linguistic Challenges

Beyond institutional constraints, lecturers also faced **pedagogical and linguistic challenges** in implementing the Direct Method effectively. One recurring issue was the **variation in students’ English proficiency levels** within a single classroom. In interviews, lecturers explained that while some students could follow instructions and participate in English-based activities, others struggled to comprehend even basic expressions. This disparity often forced lecturers to slow down the pace or resort to limited use of the students’ first language (L1) for clarification, which contradicted the principles of the Direct Method. Another difficulty lay in the lecturers’ own **linguistic confidence and spontaneous speaking ability**. Although all participating lecturers had a good command of English, several admitted that managing an entirely English-speaking class—especially during unplanned situations—was mentally demanding. One lecturer stated, *“Sometimes I want to explain a difficult concept, but it takes too long in English. I feel tempted to switch to Indonesian just to save time.”*

Moreover, planning and delivering **interactive, student-centred lessons** required significant preparation. Unlike traditional methods that rely on textbooks and direct translation, the Direct Method demands creativity and flexibility, which not all lecturers felt fully equipped to handle, particularly when faced with tight schedules or teaching multiple courses. These findings suggest that even when lecturers support the Direct Method in theory, their ability to apply it consistently is often limited by pedagogical pressures and personal language performance concerns.

Student Resistance and Cultural Factors

A further challenge in implementing the Direct Method identified by lecturers was **student resistance and cultural expectations** regarding teaching and learning. Many students were accustomed to **teacher-centred instruction** and grammar-focused learning, which contrasted sharply with the active, immersive nature of the Direct Method. As a result, several students initially felt uncomfortable with the high speaking demand and the absence of L1 support.

Lecturers observed that some students became disengaged or hesitant when asked to perform speaking tasks without prior written preparation. One lecturer explained, *“They often say, ‘We’re not ready to speak, we need more grammar first.’ It’s a mindset issue that takes time to change.”* This resistance sometimes led to passive behaviour during class activities, requiring lecturers to constantly motivate and encourage participation. **Cultural learning habits** also played a role. In many EFL contexts, students are used to being quiet in class and may view speaking up—especially with imperfect English—as a source of embarrassment. This cultural factor inhibited risk-taking, which is essential for developing fluency through the Direct Method. Furthermore, lecturers reported that some students expected **explicit correction** and direct grammar explanations, which the Direct Method typically avoids. Balancing these expectations with the method’s principles proved to be difficult, as lecturers had to modify their approach to retain student trust while still promoting English-only communication.

Adapting the Direct Method to Local Contexts

Despite the challenges, many lecturers reported making **adaptations to the Direct Method** to better suit their teaching context and student needs. These adaptations reflect a practical response to the institutional, linguistic, and cultural barriers they face. One common adaptation was the **selective use of L1** for brief explanations, especially when introducing complex instructions or abstract vocabulary. Although this contradicts the pure form of the Direct Method, lecturers believed that short L1 interventions prevented confusion and kept the lesson flowing. As one lecturer noted, *“Sometimes a quick translation saves time and helps them focus on the practice.”*

Another strategy was **modifying classroom activities** to gradually build students’ confidence. Instead of jumping into spontaneous dialogue, lecturers often began with structured speaking tasks, such as sentence drills, picture-based storytelling, and role-plays, before moving to free conversation. This scaffolded approach helped students feel more prepared and less anxious. Lecturers also give **visual and contextual aids** to the local environment. Without access to native-level resources, some used everyday items, local examples, or handmade materials to demonstrate vocabulary and concepts directly—staying true to the method’s emphasis on concrete experience, even with limited tools.

These adjustments illustrate how lecturers are not abandoning the Direct Method, but rather adapting its principles to overcome real-world classroom challenges while still promoting immersive, communicative learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that the Direct Method, when applied effectively in university-level speaking classes, significantly improves students’ oral performance. Key areas of improvement include fluency, confidence, vocabulary retention, and pronunciation accuracy. This aligns with the theoretical foundation laid out by Richards and Rodgers (2001), who emphasize that the Direct Method fosters language learning through direct associations between meaning and language, full target language immersion, and frequent oral practice without translation. The observed increase in student engagement and participation reinforces Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1982), which posits that learners acquire language best when they receive comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level ($i+1$), especially in contexts where the target language is used meaningfully. In this study, students were consistently exposed to English through role-plays, question-answer drills, and contextual vocabulary tasks, allowing them to absorb the language more naturally.

However, the data also reveals substantial implementation challenges, particularly in contexts with mixed-proficiency students, limited instructional time, large class sizes, and insufficient teaching resources. These challenges reflect the notion of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the role of scaffolding in bridging the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Lecturers in this study had to adjust the method by simplifying language, using gestures, and scaffolding activities—strategies that align with Bruner’s (1983) ideas on instructional support.

Culturally, student resistance to speaking tasks and their reliance on the first language indicate a mismatch between traditional learning expectations and communicative approaches. This highlights the emotional and affective dimensions of language learning as emphasized by Brown (2007), who argues that affective factors—such as anxiety, motivation, and risk-taking—play a crucial role in second language acquisition. While many students initially felt uncomfortable, the immersive environment gradually helped reduce fear and built confidence.

Moreover, the need for lecturers to adapt the Direct Method to suit their classroom realities supports the principle of methodological flexibility, as advocated by Larsen-Freeman (2000). Rather than adhering rigidly to a single method, effective teaching involves thoughtful adaptation to the local context. In this study, lecturers selectively used L1 for clarity, adjusted activities based on student readiness, and incorporated culturally relevant materials—all without abandoning the communicative core of the method.

In summary, this study confirms that the Direct Method holds strong potential for enhancing speaking instruction in EFL university settings. However, its effectiveness depends less on strict adherence to its principles and more on the reflective, adaptive, and context-sensitive application by educators. Teaching speaking is not solely about applying a method—it is about shaping a learning environment

where communication is meaningful, risk-taking is encouraged, and both students and teachers are empowered to navigate the complexities of real-world language use.

The analysis of data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis revealed that the implementation of the Direct Method in university-level speaking classes presents both significant opportunities and notable challenges. Overall, the findings show that when applied effectively, the Direct Method can enhance students' speaking skills—particularly in terms of fluency, confidence, vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation. Lecturers who consistently used English in the classroom, avoided translation, and employed visual aids and contextual demonstrations observed positive student engagement and gradual improvement in speaking performance.

However, several barriers impacted the full implementation of the method. Institutional limitations such as large class sizes, limited contact hours, and insufficient teaching resources often hindered immersive English environments. Pedagogical challenges also emerged, including mixed-proficiency levels, students' reluctance to participate in spontaneous speech, and the lecturers' need to balance method principles with students' expectations for grammar-focused instruction.

Cultural resistance and learners' dependence on their first language were particularly influential. Students' discomfort with speaking in English—due to fear of making mistakes or embarrassment—often discouraged active participation. In response, lecturers made strategic adaptations to the method, such as limited use of L1, scaffolded activities, and contextual adjustments, allowing the method to function more effectively within their local teaching realities. These findings confirm that while the Direct Method holds promise for improving speaking skills, its success depends heavily on flexible, context-aware application.

The findings of this study highlight more than just the practical outcomes of implementing the Direct Method—they also reflect deeper insights into the dynamics of language teaching and learning in EFL university contexts. The success of the Direct Method in improving students' speaking skills shows that immersive, communication-focused approaches are effective when students are consistently exposed to English and encouraged to use it meaningfully. However, the need for adaptation suggests that no method works in isolation from its context. The reluctance of students to fully engage in English-speaking activities reveals that language learning is not only cognitive but also emotional and cultural. Students' fears of making mistakes, their attachment to traditional grammar-based instruction, and their expectations for teacher-centred classrooms indicate that change in methodology must be accompanied by a shift in mindset—both for learners and educators.

For lecturers, these results emphasize the importance of pedagogical flexibility. Instead of rigidly applying a method, effective teachers interpret and adjust its principles to fit classroom realities. This reflective practice enables them to uphold the communicative goals of the Direct Method while remaining sensitive to students' needs. Ultimately, the study shows that meaningful speaking improvement does not come from methods alone, but from how those methods are thoughtfully implemented within a specific educational culture. The Direct Method becomes powerful not through perfection, but through practical, reflective use.

The findings of this study carry several important implications for English language teaching, particularly in EFL university contexts. First, the study reinforces the value of creating an immersive English-speaking environment in the classroom. The Direct Method, when applied with consistency and creativity, offers a viable strategy for improving students' fluency, confidence, and communicative competence. This suggests that university English programs should support methodologies that prioritize real-time communication over rote grammar instruction. Secondly, this research implies that teacher training and professional development are crucial. Lecturers need to be equipped not only with theoretical understanding of the Direct Method but also with practical strategies to adapt it to local classroom realities. Training should focus on scaffolding techniques, managing mixed-level classes, and handling student resistance in a culturally responsive way. For curriculum developers, the findings imply the need for greater flexibility in syllabus design, allowing room for communication-focused activities rather than strict adherence to traditional grammar-based content. Institutions should also consider class size, classroom resources, and contact hours, as these factors significantly impact the successful implementation of immersive methods like the Direct Method. Finally, the study emphasizes that student mindset plays a key role. Therefore, orientation programs or awareness sessions that encourage risk-taking and active language use could enhance the effectiveness of speaking instruction.

In summary, the implications of this study point toward a more holistic, communicative, and context-sensitive approach to teaching speaking at the university level. This study offers several novel contributions to the field of English language teaching, particularly in the context of speaking instruction at the university level using the Direct Method. While the Direct Method has been widely discussed in language pedagogy, its practical implementation in tertiary-level EFL classrooms—especially within Indonesian universities—remains underexplored. Most previous research has focused on its use in primary or secondary education, or in ESL contexts where learners are more frequently exposed to the target language in their environment.

The novelty of this article lies in its contextual and practical exploration of how university lecturers adapt the Direct Method to overcome common challenges such as limited resources, large class sizes, and students' low speaking confidence. Unlike earlier studies that focus on the theoretical benefits of the Direct Method, this study presents real-world applications, including lecturers' strategies for balancing method purity with local classroom realities.

Furthermore, the article introduces qualitative data-driven insights into students' responses, providing a deeper understanding of their attitudes, struggles, and progress in response to this immersive approach. This student-centred perspective adds originality by showing not just how the method is implemented, but how it is experienced. Thus, this article's novelty lies in its context-specific application, practical adaptation strategies, and integration of teacher and learner perspectives, making it a valuable reference for educators aiming to enhance speaking instruction in similar EFL university field.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of adopting more communicative, student-centred approaches to teaching speaking in EFL university classrooms. Therefore, one of the key follow-up actions is the integration of the Direct Method into broader institutional teaching practices. Universities should consider revising their English curricula to include more opportunities for real-time, immersive communication using English only, reducing the dependence on translation or native language use during class. Another critical step is to provide ongoing professional development for lecturers. Since the successful implementation of the Direct Method requires both methodological knowledge and classroom management skills, training programs should focus on equipping educators with the tools to adapt the method to local contexts. Workshops, teaching simulations, and peer observation activities can enhance lecturers' confidence and competence in applying this method.

Additionally, universities should strive to create supportive learning environments by reducing class sizes where possible, improving classroom facilities, and increasing English-speaking exposure through extracurricular programs such as speaking clubs, English corners, or conversation partners. Lastly, future research should explore the long-term impact of the Direct Method on speaking proficiency and investigate its integration with digital tools to maximize engagement. These follow-up actions are essential to ensure that the method's potential is not only recognized but also sustained and scaled across institutions.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important findings of this study is that the Direct Method significantly enhances students' speaking skills in EFL university classrooms, particularly in terms of fluency, vocabulary usage, and confidence. Students who were exposed to consistent target-language input, encouraged to speak without translating, and involved in interactive activities like role-plays and question-answer drills showed noticeable improvement over time. This suggests that increased exposure to real-time communication in English leads to better speaking performance, even in environments where English is not the primary language.

The study also revealed that student attitudes changed positively when the Direct Method was implemented in a supportive and engaging way. Many learners initially felt anxious or hesitant, but over time, they reported increased confidence and willingness to speak, especially when the teacher created a non-threatening environment and used meaningful, contextualized language input. The theoretical foundation of the Direct Method—centred on natural language acquisition and target-language immersion—proved effective in addressing the central problems identified in this research: students' limited speaking ability, over-reliance on their first language, and lack of confidence. Unlike grammar-translation approaches that often isolate language from use, the Direct Method allows language to be

experienced and practiced in context, supporting both communicative competence and pronunciation development.

Moreover, the qualitative method used—comprising observations, interviews, and document analysis—allowed for an in-depth understanding of how the Direct Method operates in practice. This triangulation of data sources ensured that the research captured the complexity of classroom dynamics and student responses. In conclusion, the theory behind the Direct Method and the research methodology employed were well-suited to addressing the research problems. The Direct Method not only improved learners' speaking ability but also shifted classroom culture toward more active, student-centred communication—making it a strong, context-appropriate approach for university-level EFL instruction.

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