

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE ROLE OF SOCIO-AFFECTIVE
STRATEGIES IN ENHANCING ESL
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS'
SPEAKING MOTIVATION AND
SPEECH FLUENCY**

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ABSTRACT

Despite the integration of socio-affective strategies into the *English for Oral Communication* (EOC) course, ESL students at a Malaysian public university continuously face persistent challenges in speaking motivation and speech fluency, which potentially affect their speaking performance and future employability. Addressing this issue, the present study investigated how socio-affective strategies can enhance ESL students' speaking motivation and speech fluency from both lecturers' and students' perspectives including examining the gender influence on the strategies used. Guided by Oxford's (1990) socio-affective strategies framework and employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 115 lecturers and 238 students. Findings revealed that lecturers employed strategies such as expressing humour and giving constructive feedback while integrating online materials to foster supportive and conducive speaking environments. They observed that students benefited from group work, peer feedback, and rehearsals in building speaking confidence and improving speech delivery. Students reported using peer interaction, relaxation techniques, and online platforms to manage speaking anxiety and enhance speech fluency. They valued lecturers' approaches that encouraged learner autonomy, emotional regulation, and motivational support throughout the learning process. Gender influenced lecturers' teaching preferences, with female lecturers using affective strategies in the classroom more frequently. However, students' use of socio-affective strategies was not influenced by gender but shaped by classroom contexts and individual experiences. Overall, the findings highlight the critical role of socio-affective strategies in enhancing students' speaking motivation and speech fluency by fostering social and emotional supports. This study offers practical implications for ESL educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in developing socially engaging and emotionally responsive pedagogical practices at tertiary level.

Keywords: Socio-Affective Strategies, ESL Speaking motivation, ESL Speech Fluency, Gender Influence, Higher Education.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xviii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement	6
1.3 Research Objectives	11
1.4 Research Questions	12
1.5 Research Hypotheses	13
1.6 Conceptual Framework	14
1.7 Significance of Study	15
1.7.1 Theoretical Significance	15
1.7.2 Pedagogical Significance	16
1.7.3 Practical Significance	17
1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study	18
1.9 Definition of Terms	19
1.9.1 Socio-affective strategies (SAS)	19
1.9.2 ESL Speaking	19
1.9.3 Motivation	20
1.9.4 Fluency	20
1.9.5 Gender	21
1.10 Chapter Summary	21

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The learning of English is becoming increasingly challenging in today's world. Aside from allowing people to communicate with each other and learn about different cultures, places, and lifestyles, the learning of the English language also expands job opportunities. In the context of learning English as a second language (ESL), the challenges in learning the language exist especially in speaking (Nadesan & Md Shah, 2020). For that reason, future generations must be profoundly competent in speaking English to face the world challenges of the future, particularly to compete in the job market. To be able to compete globally, ESL students should possess good communication skills, as these are important components of soft skills (Santhanasamy & Yunus, 2022). As a result, developing and mastering speaking skills are critically essential for effective communication.

To address the significance of ESL students' speaking skills, various approaches have been implemented in classrooms to make the teaching and learning of speaking more exciting, authentic, and meaningful. The approaches range from traditional to non-traditional, and the findings from past studies have shown that both types to be effective regardless of the timeline.

A traditional approach like role-play remains relevant and deemed effective. Togimin and Jaafar (2020) found that students improved in fluency, comprehension, context, and interactive communication through role-playing. Debates have also been proven to be an effective approach to teaching speaking skills. In the ESL setting, recent studies have discovered that debates can significantly improve students' speaking performance, increasing their speaking confidence, fluency and engagement in language classrooms (Timbu et al., 2023). Govindasamy and Shah (2020) identified other common and traditional approaches that are still relevant to this date like group discussions, story-telling, group or pair work, brainstorming, playing games, using