Tactics Used in Challenging Activities in English Language Teaching*

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the tactics used by teachers in activities in which middle school students have challenges in English language learning. The study, designed according to the phenomenological research model, consists of two phases. While the first phase was conducted in public secondary schools which are ranked at the middle level according to English scores on the High School Transition System (LGS) exam, the second phase was conducted in public secondary schools which are ranked at the high level according to English score on LGS exam in Efeler district of Aydın province. In the first phase of the study, the activities that students had challenges were identified. In the second phase, the tactics used by the teachers to overcome the challenges in the activities stated by the teachers in the first phase study group were determined. The data obtained through interviews with English language teachers in the first phase of the study was analyzed using the content analysis technique. The themes that emerged in content analysis were used in descriptive analysis in the second phase of the research. It was concluded that students had challenges in activities related to four main skills -speaking, listening, writing, and reading comprehension. Also, inadequate vocabulary and grammar, lack of motivation, and disciplinary problems especially in group or pair work emerged as common challenges in the activities related to the four skills. Participants in the second phase suggested various tactics to address these challenges.

Keywords: Challenges in English language learning, tactics in English language teaching

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Introduction

Countries have to follow the developments in different civilizations to keep up with the information age. Thus, they need to be in contact with those civilizations. This contact is realized through English, a language accepted by almost all countries (Demirel, 2012). In addition, knowing English as a foreign language, except for communication, has become a necessity for individuals to achieve their goals (Tin, 2013). Knowing a foreign language provides great opportunities in education and finding a job. In addition, language learning makes it easier to become a citizen of the world and to understand different cultures (Kalıpcı & Şimşek, 2022). Foreign language education plays a very important role in the self-development of individuals, both socio-economically and technologically (Mirici, 2001). In short, English language teaching is seen as an important subject due to the needs of both society and the individual (Maxom, 2009).

In Türkiye, as in many other countries, great importance is attached to English language teaching, but the desired level of English proficiency for students cannot be reached (Arslan, 2009). The development of the foreign language curriculum in Türkiye started in 1968 in cooperation with the Council of Europe (Demirel, 2012) and the importance given to foreign language teaching in our schools has increased over time. The English lesson, which was previously only taught in the sixth grade in the education programs, was introduced in 1997 for the fourth grade, and in the second grade in the 2013-2014 academic year (Bekleyen, 2016). In Türkiye, a student learns English as a foreign language for 12 years, from the second grade of primary school to the second year of higher education. Despite all these years, effort, and money (Karayazgan & Saracaloğlu, 2021), reaching the desired level of English proficiency has become unsuccessful (Tarcan, 2004). This situation is contrary to the principle of economy, which is one of the principles of teaching. According to the principle of economy, teaching should be carried out in the shortest time with the least amount of equipment, money, labour, and energy (Küçükahmet, 2009).

In language teaching, various activities such as developing speaking, writing, listening, reading skills, grammar, and vocabulary teaching are carried out (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Snow, 2014). In learning a new language, there are four macro skills that a learner must develop and use: listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Ambubuyog et al., 2023). Effective language education is made up of speaking, writing, and reading skills, and from these skills, listening and reading skills are defined as receptive skills, and speaking and writing skills are known as productive/expressive skills (Bygate, 1987; cited by Karayazgan & Yurdakul, 2014). On the other hand, Nation (2001; cited by Schmitt, 2008) provides a structure to integrate intentional and incidental vocabulary learning, emphasizing the importance of vocabulary in language acquisition. Moreover, grammar is considered the basis of language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing, highlighting its foundational role in language acquisition (Andriani et al., 2021).

During language learning activities, some challenges may arise for both the EFL (English as a foreign language) learners and the EFL teacher (Reiss, 2012). While carrying out the activities, various challenges may arise due to factors such as teacher competencies, student motivation, the limitation of learning English in a natural environment, lack or poor quality of materials, and deficiencies in the assessment and evaluation system (Arı, 2014; Özen et al., 2013; Yaman, 2018). To overcome these challenges, it is important to know which tactics are successful in terms of time and labour economy (Sharif, 2012). Tactic is the path followed to achieve the desired result (TDK, 2023). Şimşek (2014; 159) defines tactics as specific and narrow-scale parts of the technique. For example, while forming teams in a team game activity, a teacher can make the students who were

in the same group in the previous activity be in different groups, by determining colour cards. In other words, many different tactics can be used by teachers and students in the use of a technique or the realization of an activity. In education, employing effective teaching tactics is crucial for enhancing learning outcomes (Puranik, 2020). These tactics encompass a range of strategies including interactive teaching, cooperative learning, and redefining teachers' roles to improve student engagement and knowledge acquisition (Ma, 2023), and students use their ways and strategies while learning languages (Eken & Gündoğdu, 2021). The implementation of diverse and evidence-based tactics is essential for promoting student engagement, improving learning outcomes, and catering to the diverse needs of learners across various educational settings. This study aims to determine the tactics used by teachers in activities in which students have challenges in English language teaching. The sub-problems sought to be answered according to this purpose are given below;

1. What are the activities that students have challenges in learning English?
2. Which tactics do teachers use to overcome the challenges faced by English language learners?

The challenges faced by learners in learning a new language are multifaceted and can be daunting for many (Alsalihi, 2020). Understanding and addressing these challenges are crucial for educators to provide effective support and enhance the language learning experience for foreign language learners (Trninić-Janjić, 2018). Also, this study contributes to the literature by identifying the tactics that teachers use in activities where students have challenges in learning English. By engaging with teachers who have first-hand experience overcoming difficulties, this research offers a fresh perspective on the issues commonly faced in educational settings. In this way, the easy-to-implement, low-cost but effective teacher tactics used by teachers who overcome the challenges in English language teaching will guide practitioners. Moreover, the implementation of a two-phased study aimed at first identifying the challenges experienced by several English language teachers during English lessons, and then capturing the insights of English language teachers who have successfully navigated challenging circumstances, represents a departure from conventional research practices within the existing literature, which studied only challenges or tactics during English lessons.

Method

The study consisting of two phases, was designed according to the phenomenological research model, which is one of the qualitative research types. Phenomenological research is a type of study that makes sense of individuals' experiences about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In the first phase of this study, the activities that students in public secondary schools in the Efeler district of Aydın province, which are ranked in the middle according to English score rankings in the High School Transition System (LGS) had challenges. In the second phase, the tactics used by the teachers working in public schools ranked higher according to the LGS exam English score ranking to overcome the challenges in the activities stated by the teachers in the first phase study group were determined.

Study Group

While determining the study group, criterion-based sampling, one of the purposeful sampling types, was used. In purposive sampling, the researcher determines the qualifications of the individuals who represent the study group and reaches the individuals with the determined qualifications (Christensen, Burke-Johson & Turner, 2015). In the first phase of this study, which

was conducted in the 2022-2023 academic year, the criterion was determined as "working in public secondary schools at the middle achievement level in terms of 2022 LGS English scores" in Efeler district of Aydın province. In the second phase, the criterion for the study group was determined as "working in public secondary schools with high achievement level in terms of 2022 LGS English scores" in the Efeler district of Aydın province. Information on achievement levels of the schools in terms of 2022 LGS was obtained from the Ar-Ge (Research and Development) Unit of the Aydın Provincial Directorate of National Education. The number of the study groups was decided by using data saturation; while in the first phase of the study, 13 volunteer teachers working in public secondary schools with medium achievement levels in English participated in the study, 11 teachers working in public secondary schools at a high level according to English achievement participated in the second phase of the study. The participants interviewed in the first phase were coded as "aP" and the participants interviewed in the second phase were coded as "bP" to keep the identities of the participants anonymous. Personal information about the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant information

Participants for the first phase												
Participant code	aP1	aP2	aP3	aP4	aP5	aP6	aP7	aP8	aP9	aP10	aP11	aP12	aP13
Gender	M	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	M	M	F	M	F
Age	43	36	42	40	44	49	40	45	40	39	41	42	50
Seniority	22	13	18	14	15	25	18	20	16	17	17	21	27
Participants for the second phase												
Participant code	bP1	bP2	bP3	bP4	bP5	bP6	bP7	bP8	bP9	bP10	bP11		
Gender	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	M	F	F	F		
Age	47	43	40	45	50	52	53	44	39	55	54		
Seniority	23	20	15	19	26	18	17	19	13	31	29		

Table 1 shows that there were 7 female and 6 male participants in the first phase of the research. The age of the participants varies between 36 and 50 years. The participants have a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 27 years of professional experience. In the second phase of the research, there were 8 female and 3 male participants. The age of the participants varies between 39 and 55 years. The participants have a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 29 years of professional experience.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, data were collected through interviews with English language teachers working in the identified schools. The necessary permissions were obtained from the national education directorate as well as approval from the educational research ethics committee for data collection. Volunteer participants signed a consent form before the interview, and the identities of

the participants were kept anonymous. Semi-structured interview forms developed by the researcher were used in the interviews. The first phase interview form was prepared for English teachers in public secondary schools at the middle level of English achievement, while the second phase interview form was prepared for English teachers in public secondary schools at the high level of English achievement. Expert opinion was taken while preparing the interview forms; expert opinion is a crucial component in qualitative research, contributing to the credibility and validity of study findings. Chapman et al. (2018) integrated peer debriefing with qualitative research experts to enhance the rigor of the research by seeking feedback on study design and analysis. Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted with an English teacher for each form. Pilot studies can also aid in establishing the validity and reliability of interview questionnaires, contributing to the overall quality of qualitative research (Aung et al., 2021). The interview forms were organized according to the feedback from the expert and the teacher. Examples of questions from the interviews in both phases are presented below;

Question from the interview in the first phase; *"In which activities do you notice that your students have the most challenges in your class? Can you give examples?"*

Question from the interview in the second phase; *"What do you do to overcome the fear of making mistakes in speaking activities?"*

In the first phase of the study, the data obtained from the interviews with the participants were analyzed using the inductive content analysis technique. In content analysis, data that are similar to each other are brought together within the framework of certain concepts and themes, organized and interpreted in a reasonable way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data collected in the first phase was analysed independently by two experts. To increase reliability, the findings were compared and disagreements between the experts were discussed. The themes that emerged in the content analysis were used in descriptive analysis in the second phase of the research. In descriptive analysis, the collected data are collected and interpreted in predetermined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data collection analysis process is given in Figure 1 below:
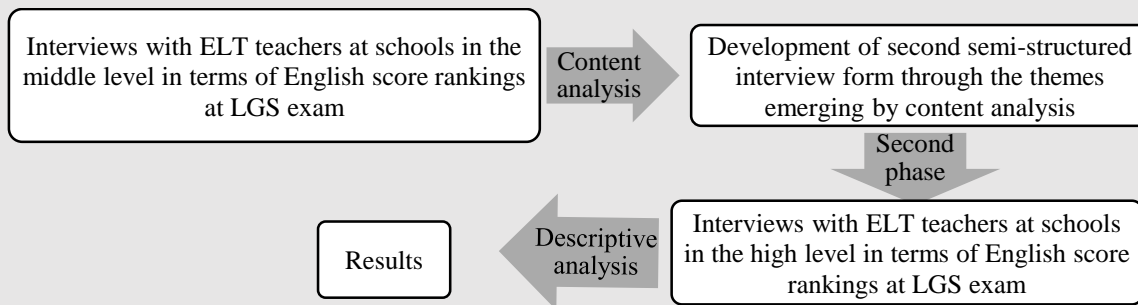

Figure 1. Data collection and analysis process

Figure 1 provides a brief explanation of the data collection and analysis process. In the first phase of the research, interviews were conducted with ELT teachers in schools at the middle level in terms of English score rankings in the LGS exam. The data collected in the first phase was analysed using content analysis. A second semi-structured interview form was developed based on the themes that emerged from the content analysis. In the second phase of the research, interviews were conducted with ELT teachers at schools at the high level in terms of English score

rankings at the LGS exam. Then, the data collected in the second phase were analysed by descriptive analysis and the results were obtained.

Results

In the first phase of the study, it was found that the participants had different challenges in activities on the four macro skills- speaking, listening, writing, and reading comprehension. It was also found that the participants had common challenges in the activities in terms of vocabulary, grammar, instructions, and group work. In the "results" chapter, the challenges and tactics in the four basic skills are given first, and then the common challenges and tactics are given. Direct quotations from participants are also included.

In the first phase of the study, 13 teachers working in public secondary schools at a middle-achievement level were asked the question "What are the activities that students have challenges in learning English?" The answers given by 13 participants were analysed by content analysis and the findings are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Activities in which students have challenges in learning English

Activities	Teacher Code	Sample Quotations
Speaking	aP1, aP2, aP3, aP5, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP10, aP11, aP12, aP13	aP1: "… Children have problems in every skill, they cannot speak, they cannot understand, they do not recognize words, they cannot follow instructions."
Listening	aP1, aP3, aP4, aP5, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP9, aP10, aP11, aP12	
Writing	aP1, aP2, aP3, aP4, aP5, aP6, aP9, aP10, aP11, aP13	
Reading comprehension	aP1, aP2, aP3, aP4, aP5, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP9, aP10, aP11, aP12, aP13	aP8: "… they cannot follow what is spoken and read in English, they cannot understand."
Vocabulary	aP2, aP3, aP4, aP5, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP9, aP10, aP12, aP13	aP10: "Students cannot speak, write, understand. Even though reading is the skill we emphasize the most, we have a lot of problems with it too."
Grammar	aP1, aP3, aP4, aP5, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP9, aP11, aP12, aP13	
Following instructions	aP1, aP2, aP3, aP4, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP9, aP10, aP12, aP13	
Group work	aP3, aP4, aP5, aP6, aP7, aP8, aP10, aP11	

An analysis of Table 2 shows that teachers had difficulties with the four macro skills and other components of language, namely vocabulary and grammar activities. In addition, instructions and group activities are also challenging for teachers. Challenges and tactics in speaking activities are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges and tactics in speaking activities

Challenge 1: Not being able to speak/not knowing how to speak		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Modelling	bP2, bP3, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP10	bP5: "There are characters in the texts in the book; I want them to get into their roles, I want them to read the dialogues by acting them out, then I motivate them to say similar dialogues."
bP9: "I also use the smart board, there are some programs, I make use of them, I make them watch videos with simple dialogues."
bP11: "I have puppets in my closet. I put them in my hand and give them clues on how to speak. It is more fun and attracts their attention more."
Role-playing	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP9	
Support with body language	bP3, bP4, bP8, bP9, bP10	
Using materials (puppets, masks...)	bP2, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP11	
Using interactive programs	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP9, bP10	
Giving hints	bP1, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP11	
Using videos	bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	
Challenge 2: Fear of making mistakes		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Encouragement	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP8, bP9, bP10	bP4: "I try to encourage the students. I also give them hints by saying, 'Say this, say that'; when they feel a little confident, they speak."
bP6: "There are a few students, they are always making fun and mischief. In every speaking activity, I make especially one of those students speak so that they stop dealing with the others and focus on the lesson."
bP8: "I ignore small mistakes. If I try to correct every mistake, the student will get tired of speaking, I try to minimize the intervention."
Preventing mockery	bP1, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP10, bP11	
Guidance by hinting	bP1, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP8, bP9, bP10, bP11	
Ignoring mistakes	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP10	
Challenge 3: Pronunciation error		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Instant correction	bP1, bP2, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP8, bP9, bP10, bP11	bP1: "There are too many pronunciation mistakes. I can ignore some of them, but if I don't intervene, then they learn as if they are correct. While I correct very big mistakes immediately so as not to disrupt the activity, I correct small mistakes later."
bP5: "I make them listen to examples from videos and audio recordings in simple language. Then I make them repeat it to the class."
bP7: "I tell them that mistakes can be made, that it is natural. I explain that the important thing is to say the right thing correctly. They ask me about the words they are not sure of and try to pronounce them correctly."
Ignoring small mistakes	bP1, bP3, bP4, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9, bP10	
Playing audio recordings	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9	
Repetition	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP10, bP11	
Modelling	bP2, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9, bP10	
Creating phonemic awareness	bP3, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP8, bP11	
Motivating	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP4, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	

Table 3 shows the various tactics that teachers used and considered to be effective in the face of the challenges (not being able to speak/not knowing how to speak, fear of making mistakes, and pronunciation errors) that came to the fore in speaking activities. Challenges and tactics in listening activities are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Challenges and tactics in listening activities

Challenge 1: Failure to understand		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Guidance (cues, body language, etc.)	bP1, bP2, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP10	bP2: "I provide guidance by giving hints. First, I make them listen to the text completely, then I play it part by part and stop it. Listen, here, for example, he said travel, what travel means, where they went."
Dictation	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP7, bP8, bP9, bP11	bP4: "When there are very complex texts, the written text of a very long, challenging piece; I can read it more slowly and emphatically. While doing this, I also involve my body language, I try to explain it as they will understand."
Incentives to watch foreign broadcasts	bP3, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9	bP6: "I also tell them to listen to cartoons and animations in English. There are so many cartoon channels, I tell them to change the sound type and watch them, and you will benefit a lot. Sometimes I bring videos in simple language and make them watch them."
Replay playback	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	
Challenge 2: Lack of interest		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Making a statement	bP1, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP8, bP11	bP3: "I explain what the piece is about, what they will focus on."
Fun voice-over/animation	bP3, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9	bP7: "I can attract their interest by acting in those roles by performing the piece myself." bP8: "I try to attract their interest as much as I can with movements, different voices, and intonations."
Brainstorming	bP2, bP6, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	
Challenge 3: Insufficient time		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Reducing repeat listening by giving hints	bP1, bP2, bP5, bP6, bP9, bP10	bP5: "The listening texts in the book can be very challenging. Instead of making them listen to them and wasting time in vain, I find videos that are more suitable for the level of the students and go through them." bP6: "Audio texts and videos about some subjects should not be skipped. I make them watch and listen to audio files and videos related to official days and important events. Sometimes I may skip other activities or skills."
Selection of the most appropriate listening texts for the purpose	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP8, bP10, bP11	bP10: "Unfortunately, the audio files sent to us are far above the level of the students. Therefore, I have a folder with pieces and videos suitable for our subject at the most basic simple level. I choose the most appropriate ones; I save both time and effort."
Taking time from other activities	bP3, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9	

Table 4 shows the various tactics that teachers used and considered to be effective in the face of the challenges (failure to understand, lack of interest, and insufficient time) that came to the fore in listening activities. Challenges and tactics in writing activities are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Challenges and tactics in writing activities

Tactic	Teacher Code	Sample Quotations
Challenge 1: Spelling error		
Rewriting	bP2, bP4, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP11	bP2: "I can reprint words or sentence patterns so that their hands get used to them. While they are writing, I repeat those patterns and words verbally."
Correction	bP1, bP3, bP4, bP6, bP8, bP10	bP10: "I print the words we learn in a few examples. It is effective to print a few examples in context."
Doing vocabulary study	bP1, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	bP11: "I make them keep a vocabulary notebook; they write the words in their vocabulary notebooks according to the alphabetical number. I also make them write sample sentences, I make them repeat them, and check the notebooks."
Challenge 2: Sentence structure		
Additional spelling practice	bP1, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP9	
Grammar practice	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP5, bP8, bP11	bP1: "I make them repeat as much as possible in order to reduce the errors in sentence formation."
Visual stimuli	bP2, bP3, bP6, bP8, bP9, bP10	bP5: "I give additional exercises; I ask them to write by making different examples."
Sample writing	bP1, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP10, bP11	bP9: "I check the examples and ask them to correct the mistakes."
Correction	bP3, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9, bP11	
Challenge 3: Inflectional suffixes		
Rewriting	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP6, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	bP3: "I give different words; I make them write what their second forms are. Sometimes I make it a contest. The ones who get it right the most win the contest."
Additional spelling work	bP3, bP4, bP5, bP8, bP9, bP10	bP4: "I try to increase retention by reprinting with plenty of examples."
Visual stimuli	bP1, bP2, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8	bP9: "I ask them to write different words, it can be overcome by practicing spelling a lot."
Challenge 4: Reluctance		
Sample spelling	bP3, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP10, bP11	bP3: "I first write an example and explain how to write it."
		bP5: "In a fun and lively way, I explain and motivate which element will be where, which will come where, how it will be added a few times."
Motivating	bP2, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9,	bP9: "I explain why this spelling is important, where you will need it in the future, I explain it well and motivate you."
Challenge 5: Fear of making mistakes		
Motivating	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP4, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP10	bP3: "I try to motivate them by saying why this writing activity is important, why it will work."
Talking about experiences	bP1, bP4, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP9	bP7: "I tell them that mistakes are inevitable, that I can sometimes make mistakes myself. I say that the important thing is to learn the right thing."

| | | bP11: "When students who come to the board make mistakes, there may |
| Warning other students | bP2, bP3, bP5, bP9, bP11 | be people who make fun of them. I prevent students who intervene, I give time for students to correct their own mistakes." |

Table 5 shows the various tactics that teachers used and considered to be effective in the face of the challenges (spelling errors, sentence structure, inflectional suffixes, reluctance, and fear of making mistakes) that came to the fore in writing activities. Challenges and tactics in reading comprehension activities are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Challenges and tactics in reading comprehension activities

Challenge 1: Not understanding what they read		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Additional reading comprehension practice	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP7, bP8, bP10	bP3: "We have simple storybooks that they will like. I assign them to read it. They ask about the parts they don't understand, take notes on the words, summarize it."
Note-taking	bP1, bP3, bP5, bP6, bP11	bP6: "I ask them to take small notes on the book while reading the passage. I make them underline the important parts and take notes next to it."
Summarizing	bP3, bP4, bP8, bP9, bP10	bP9: "After the reading text is read, I ask them to summarize it. I help them where they have challenges."
Supporting	bP2, bP5, bP9	
Giving hints	bP1, bP11, bP7	

Challenge 2: Reluctance		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Motivating	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP6, bP10, bP11	bP1: "They mentioned an important event here, it can happen to us too, let's read what happened. This text happened to a man in this profession, I make them wonder what it could be and make them read it."
Making it fun	bP3, bP4, bP5, bP7, bP8, bP9	bP4: "Some parts can be very boring. I agree, I try to attract their interest by reading the text with different emphasis and voice tones."
		bP10: "I emphasize what the passage is about, why it is important. I explain what it will do to understand what is written here. Thus, I realize motivation."

Table 6 shows the various tactics that teachers used and considered to be effective in the face of the challenges (Not understanding what they read and reluctance) that came to the fore in reading comprehension activities. Challenges commonly faced in activities on four main skills emerged through content analysis in the first phase of the research, and tactics for every challenge are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Common challenges and tactics in activities

Challenge 1: Lack of vocabulary		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Engaging activities/ games	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP7, bP8	bP2: "I make competition-oriented games, children are more willing to learn vocabulary when they enjoy it." bP9: "For each unit, I give vocabulary quizzes on the words that appear there." bP10: "They have vocabulary notebooks; they write down the words in their vocabulary notebooks. Sometimes I call the students randomly and check their notebooks. When they are checked, they pay attention to their notebooks."
Visuals	bP1, bP4, bP6, bP11	
Repeating	bP3, bP5, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP10	
Keeping a vocabulary notebook	bP4, bP5, bP6, bP9, bP10	
Memorization	bP1, bP3, bP5, bP11	
Quizzes	bP1, bP6, bP7, bP8, bP9	
Using song	bP4, bP6, bP8, bP11	
Dictionary usage	bP1, bP3, bP4, bP6, bP7, bP9	
Plenty of practice	bP2, bP3, bP6, bP10, bP11	
Challenge 2: Grammatical error		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Abundant examples	bP1, bP2, bP5, bP8, bP10	bP1: "I give plenty of examples. As the term progress, as similar patterns come, I remind them again and give examples." bP3: "When students make mistakes, instead of giving them the correct answer directly, I make them find the right answer on their own. I remind them of the examples I gave while explaining the subject, I make them see where the mistake is." bP6: "We write the important grammar rules in the unit on the appropriate places on the board and teach the unit and the topic in that way. Students make use of them while giving examples appropriate to those patterns."
Make them find the right answer themselves	bP2, bP3, bP4, bP8, bP9	
Making a statement	bP5, bP6, bP11	
Mold comparison	bP4, bP5, bP8	
Giving the grammar rule	bP3, bP4, bP6, bP10, bP11	
Gamification	bP2, bP3, bP4	
Interactive program	bP1, bP7, bP9, bP10, bP11	
Challenge 3: Following instructions		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Doing activities on instruction patterns	bP5, bP7, bP8, bP9	bP4: "The thing to do about the instruction patterns is to minimize the use of Turkish and give the instructions in the target language unless it is very difficult." bP5: "It is necessary to repeat and remind the instruction patterns from time to time. I give commands and apply them myself; I model them." bP9: "I have a list of instructions; I can prepare activities related to the instructions I choose from that list. I can have them do activities such as matching patterns with Turkish or asking the meaning of the pattern."
Language exposure	bP1, bP2, bP4,	
Modelling	bP5, bP7, bP8,	
Repeating	bP3, bP4, bP6, bP9	
Peer support	bP2, bP3, bP10	
Challenge 4: Ensuring participation in group work		
Tactic	**Teacher Code**	**Sample Quotations**
Heterogeneous group formation	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP4, bP5, bP10	bP2: "I try to make the successful students and the distribution of girls and boys equal in the groups. When there are balanced groups, more challenging and fun competitions emerge."
Increase participation by supporting	bP4, bP7, bP8, bP11	
Explaining the rules	bP3, bP6, bP8, bP9, bP10	

Changing participants in each group activity	bP1, bP2, bP3, bP5, bP11	bP8: "During group work, I support the students who remain passive by moving between the groups to see where and how they can contribute." bP11: "Joint activities with the same people can be boring. Therefore, I determine different groups for each group activity."

Table 7 shows the various tactics that teachers used and considered to be effective in the face of the common challenges (lack of vocabulary, grammatical error, following instructions, and ensuring participation in group work) faced in activities on four major skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading comprehension) that came to the fore in reading comprehension activities.

The analysis of the data revealed that students face difficulties in speaking, listening, writing, and reading comprehension skills. Common challenges include insufficient vocabulary and grammar, lack of motivation, and discipline issues, especially in group work. Speaking challenges stem from fear of making mistakes and limited vocabulary while listening difficulties arise from comprehension issues and lack of motivation. Writing challenges include spelling errors, sentence structure mistakes, and low motivation. Reading comprehension challenges are primarily due to limited vocabulary and grammatical errors. Teachers employ various strategies such as modelling, providing guidance, using visual aids, and encouraging participation to overcome these challenges. Additionally, teachers use activities like songs and games to enrich vocabulary and provide grammar examples and comparisons to address grammar-related issues. In group work, creating diverse groups, explaining rules, and rotating participants help enhance participation.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the findings obtained from the analysis of the data, it was concluded that the students had challenges in activities related to speaking, listening, writing, and reading comprehension skills. Insufficient vocabulary and grammar, lack of motivation, and discipline problems that arise especially in group work have emerged as common challenges in the activities. Speaking proficiency is a common challenge, with learners experiencing anxiety when trying to improve their speaking skills (Meng et al., 2020). Writing skills present another hurdle for foreign language learners, as mastering writing in a second language is complex and can be influenced by their first language literacy skills (Karlina & Pancoro, 2018). Furthermore, challenges in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, spelling, pronunciation, reading, and listening are commonly reported by foreign language learners in distance learning settings (Wulandari & Budiyanto, 2017).

Reasons for challenges in speaking activities; students are weak in speaking skills in a foreign language, they are afraid of making mistakes in front of their friends and teachers, they make too many pronunciation and grammatical errors, and their vocabulary is insufficient. To overcome these challenges, teachers serve as models for students, motivate them, ignore minor mistakes, and use various materials. Foreign language learners encounter numerous challenges in speaking activities, including linguistic barriers, speech processing issues, lack of confidence, limited access to speaking opportunities, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and inadequate vocabulary and topical knowledge (Trinh & Pham, 2021). External factors like peer pressure and fear of judgment (Alrasheedi, 2021), along with classroom conditions like class size and crowdedness (Alsalihi, 2020), and internal factors like shyness, anxiety (Alrasheedi, 2021), lack of motivation, and unfamiliarity with topics (Alsalihi, 2020), significantly impact students' speaking performance. To address these challenges, educators employ various strategies, including using songs, interactive activities, social media tools, and gamification to reduce anxiety and

promote communication (Latkovska & Cine, 2022). Classroom activities like storytelling, speeches, debates, and English movies are recommended to enhance speaking proficiency (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022).

Reasons for challenges in listening activities are students' failure to understand what they are listening to, problems related to the materials, lack of motivation, and lack of lesson time. To overcome these challenges, teachers guide them with clues, make students listen to the text again, vocalize the listening text themselves, use the audio files and materials they have acquired, and encourage students to participate by encouraging them. Listening is widely considered the most challenging language skill due to its complexity and the diverse knowledge required for successful comprehension (Nowrouzi et al., 2015). Listening challenges are compounded by factors like limited vocabulary and lack of understanding of discourse genres (Su & Liu, 2012). Developing active engagement with listening materials to enhance comprehension (Moreira and Montes, 2021), incorporating multimedia resources and interactive tools for engaging practice (Peixoto et al., 2019), encouraging extensive listening practice and exploration of strategies (Ariani et al., 2020), involving peer interaction for practice and feedback (Thandevaraj et al., 2021) and strengthening vocabulary to aid comprehension have been suggested to overcome the problems faced during listening activities.

In writing activities, students make a lot of spelling mistakes, make mistakes in sentence structures, and confuse the cases of verbs and adjectives. Also, insufficient vocabulary and low motivation are among the problems that arise. Teachers try to overcome these challenges by making sample writing, showing sample writings, additionally doing vocabulary and grammar studies and writing activities, and motivating students and encouraging them to participate in the activity. Foreign language learners face several challenges in writing, including writing anxiety, lack of vocabulary, mother tongue interference, grammar challenges, weak organization, and poor spelling (Li, 2022). Lack of vocabulary, ideas, anxiety, and poor structure compound these challenges (Cheng, 2002), exacerbated by insufficient practice (Alzahrani et al., 2021). To address these challenges; teaching strategies, skills, and knowledge can empower students to write effectively (Paz & Graham, 2002). Planning, monitoring, and evaluating writing processes enhance writing performance (Yan, 2019). Digital resources can facilitate writing organisation and revision (Schcolnik, 2018). Also, peer interaction and feedback promote skill enhancement, and understanding writing's social function improves contextual production (Saksono, 2022). Finally, emphasizing vocabulary acquisition enhances proficiency (Pichette et al., 2011).

The main reasons for the challenges experienced in reading comprehension activities are the students' insufficient vocabulary knowledge and grammatical errors. Other reasons include students' low motivation and participation in reading activities. Teachers try to overcome these challenges by doing vocabulary and grammar studies, assigning additional reading assignments, making summaries, making reading activities more fun, and using different materials. Foreign language learners face a myriad of challenges in reading comprehension, including reading anxiety, unfamiliar topics, lack of understanding of the language system, poor recognition of reading strategies, and low language proficiency (Sellers, 2000). Challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, and syntactic knowledge further complicate comprehension (Morvay, 2012). Ambiguous words and unfamiliar vocabulary pose additional obstacles (Generoso & Arbon, 2020), exacerbated by perceived challenges and fear (Noorezam et al., 2022). Emphasizing vocabulary acquisition is crucial for comprehension (Zhang & Anual, 2008). Peer interaction and feedback exchange can enhance reading skills (Stranovska & Gadusova, 2022). Also, regular reading enhances cognitive and linguistic abilities (Syafitri, 2019).

To enrich students' vocabulary, teachers teach vocabulary with songs and games, use visual materials, make them repeat a lot, and conduct vocabulary exams. In addition, challenges related to vocabulary are tried to be reduced by using vocabulary notebooks and dictionaries during the activities. Providing explicit instruction on vocabulary acquisition, including teaching word meanings, usage, and context, can help learners expand their vocabulary knowledge (Lock et al., 2007). Incorporating interactive tools like Quizlet, Padlet, and educational games can make vocabulary learning engaging and effective (Sanosi, 2018). Encouraging learners to acquire vocabulary in context through extensive reading and exposure to authentic materials can improve the retention and application of new words (Barcroft, 2004). Implementing collaborative tasks that involve vocabulary acquisition can provide opportunities for peer interaction, practice, and reinforcement of new words (Sadeghi & Safari, 2012).

To overcome grammar-related problems, sample examples of relevant grammatical patterns are provided, visual materials are used during the activities, grammar patterns are compared, different materials are used and games are included. Providing explicit instruction on grammar rules, structures, and usage can help learners understand and apply grammar concepts effectively (Brown, 2009). Incorporating interactive tools and educational games focused on grammar can make learning engaging and effective (Fithriani, 2022).

Creating heterogeneous groups, increasing participation by supporting, explaining the rules, and changing participants in each group ensure participation in group work. Clearly defining objectives, assigning specific roles, and setting expectations for participation and collaboration fosters participation in group work (Meiramova & Zhanysbayeva, 2020). Also, encouraging open communication, active listening, and providing opportunities for students to express ideas can create a supportive environment (Ahmadi et al., 2012). Also, encouraging peer support and feedback within groups facilitates learning and provides constructive feedback on language use (Leong & Masoumeh, 2017).

Suggestions

The results of the research highlighted numerous challenges faced by students in foreign language learning, particularly in speaking, listening, writing, reading comprehension skills, vocabulary, and grammar. These challenges stem from various factors including insufficient vocabulary and grammar knowledge, lack of motivation, discipline issues, anxiety, fear of judgment, and limited access to speaking opportunities. However, educators have employed diverse strategies to address these challenges, including modelling, motivation, varied materials, interactive activities, and peer support. Researchers can further explore the underlying psychological factors contributing to language learning anxiety, fear of judgment, and motivation issues. Investigating effective teaching methodologies tailored to individual learning styles and preferences could enhance language acquisition outcomes. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effectiveness of interventions in improving language proficiency and reducing learning barriers. On the other hand, implementers should prioritize creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel encouraged to participate and make mistakes without fear of judgment. They can incorporate a variety of engaging tactics, which can enhance language learning outcomes and overall student engagement. Also, teachers in the same educational district could meet periodically to share their experiences of challenges and tactics. Moreover, pre-service teachers could be provided with videos, visuals, or role-playing examples of possible challenges in undergraduate courses and discuss how to

overcome them. As for curriculum makers, there could also be a section on common challenges and tactics that can be applied within the curriculum.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author conducted the study alone. There is no conflict of interest.

Ethics

This study was carried out in accordance with the ethics committee permission dated 08.12.2020 and numbered 2020/19 obtained from Aydın Adnan Menderes University Educational Researches Ethics Committee.

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