

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (AICELT)

Mataram, Indonesia, 7 – 8 June 2023 Available at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/aicelt/index>

English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Mataram

EFL TEACHERS' CHOICES ON THE TEACHING STRATEGIES THAT IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract

Mastering speaking skills is paramount for vocational high school students, as it can enhance their employability and career prospects. Hence, the role of teachers in selecting and implementing strategies in teaching speaking is vital. However, to measure the success of speaking that develops students' interpersonal skills, teachers must be able to consider a suitable strategy that meets the demands of the students. The current study intends to investigate the teaching strategies employed by English teachers when teaching English speaking skills to students in Grades X, XI, and XIII. This research was conducted in one of the vocational schools in Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan. A qualitative method was used to collect the data. The interviews and observations were conducted with the teachers. The findings revealed that the teachers taught speaking using Fishbowl, Role-play, and Storytelling, which they believe can intensify students' critical thinking, confidence, participation, and knowledge in speaking. It shows that the teachers met their success in improving students' speaking skills by using those strategies.

Keywords: Teaching Strategies, Speaking Skills, Vocational High School

INTRODUCTION

The mastery of English speaking skills is essential for personal and professional growth. Whether critical in daily interactions or career development, expressing oneself articulately and effectively is valuable (Rao, 2019). In today's competitive job market, employers seek candidates who possess strong communication skills. This is in line with the survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in 2022 that speaking skills are ranked as the most important attribute employers look for in job candidates. In relation to that, vocational high school students are the ones who need to master it the most because vocational high schools prepare students for specific careers which require specialized skills and knowledge. By improving their speaking skills, Apsari et al. (2022) state that students can enhance their employability and career prospects, build strong relationships with colleagues and clients, and improve their overall productivity.

In fact, speaking is the most difficult skill for EFL students (Nugroho &

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Nartiningrum, 2020) for various reasons, namely lack of vocabulary, inadequate grammar knowledge, fear of making mistakes, low self-esteem, and anxiety in speaking English. Learning English in vocational schools becomes more challenging than in public schools since some technical terms are used in each major of vocational schools that make them different from English in general (Mahbub, 2018). Hence, the role of teachers in selecting and implementing strategies in teaching speaking is vital to ensuring that each student is provided with the necessary support to achieve academic success. This requires teachers' ability to use appropriate strategies that facilitate students' development in speaking English and students' knowledge of linguistic components and compensatory strategies as well (BOUZAR, 2019). Additionally, teachers need to consider students' willingness to communicate (Alimorad & Farahmand, 2021) when they teach English, particularly speaking skills. Pertaining to this, vocational English teachers need to apply specific strategies in teaching speaking to ensure their students can speak.

Teaching strategies applied by English teachers depend on certain factors. (Mulyanti et al., 2021) discover some factors that senior high school teachers consider before deciding on the strategies to teach English speaking. The factors include the school curriculum, students' learning styles, English levels, and lesson materials. The teachers in their study used four strategies, namely interviews, storytelling, role-play, and describing a picture. In a similar direction, Hasibuan et al. (2022) found that storytelling and role-play positively impact students' speaking abilities because they teach them how to speak with proper gestures and intonation.

Another study by Amir et al. (2022) identified that the strategies used by teachers are live listening, dialog, presentation, discussion, conversation, and chat. These strategies are chosen based on the teaching materials, class situations, and students' needs. Moreover, they selected the strategies because they were easy to be implemented, made the class more active, and made the material easy to be delivered. Additionally, during the most recent pandemic situation, effective teaching strategies were also necessary. Rahmanita (2022) discovered that games and Question-Answer activities via Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp could increase students' learning during the pandemic as most students participated enthusiastically. Therefore, applying a

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suitable strategy enables the students to comprehend the subject matter easily.

Previous studies have revealed teaching strategies used by the teachers of vocational schools, namely interviews, storytelling, role-play, describing a picture, live listening, dialog, presentation, discussion, conversation, chat, games, and Question-Answer for various scopes. The studies also show that good and suitable strategies lead to the expected learning outcomes and students' understanding. The choice of teaching strategies depends on teachers' knowledge, belief, and practices (Lan & Lam, 2020). Particularly in teaching English speaking, teachers have conceptions that they should encourage students to speak and that the teachers themselves should speak English (Baleghizadeh & Shahri, 2014). Their study reveals that repetition, conversation, and discussion are necessary to develop fluency, as explained by the subjects of their research varying from expert to novice teachers. The expert teacher is more knowledgeable than the novice. Teachers with more experience demonstrated significantly different attitudes toward teaching styles, such as improved student interactions and decision-making abilities (Ismail et al., 2018). Therefore, the present study tries to reveal the instructional strategies applied by expert teachers of vocational school when they teach English speaking skills in different grades, that is, Grades X, XI, and XII. It also tries to investigate the reasons the teachers have for implementing the strategies.

This study is expected to present speaking strategies that may help students in learning English, especially on the topic of speaking. Besides, the teachers' way of teaching is essential (Khairunnisa et al., 2020) for creating effective learning results. Thus, the objectives of this research are twofold: to explore the teaching speaking strategies used and why the teachers chose the strategies. In service of this end, the present research acquires the formulation of the problem, which is as follows: (1) What are the teaching speaking strategies used by the teachers? (2) What are the reasons behind the selection of the strategies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective communication is critical to language learning, and speaking abilities are crucial. In today's competitive world, every English language learner wants to

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develop his or her speaking skills to succeed in the worldwide economy. Job seekers who demonstrate their speaking abilities will be in the best positions (Rao, 2019). However, speaking as a skill is a significant challenge for both the teacher and the learner. The teacher must devise suitable strategies to assist the learner, while the latter must determine a method to master the language (BOUZAR, 2019). In other words, English teachers must construct or design instructional strategies for a particular field so that students have the necessary exposure to English for their future (Mahbub, 2018). Therefore, EFL teachers can establish an atmosphere that nourishes and improves students' speaking skills, allowing them to communicate successfully in English by choosing strategies according to learner needs, proficiency levels, and instructional contexts.

Moreover, earlier studies have shown that many EFL teachers recognize the value of using significant strategies and contexts to improve speaking skills (Yustiati et al., 2015; Rahayu, 2015; Hasibuan et al., 2022). By incorporating Role-play, Storytelling, and other strategies into speaking activities, students are exposed to natural language patterns and cultural aspects. This exposure contributes to the development of speaking fluency and accuracy. Authentic contexts, such as role-play, can mirror real-life situations, allowing students to practice their speaking skills in meaningful and relevant ways.

In conclusion, EFL teachers' choices regarding teaching strategies for improving speaking skills are instrumental in facilitating effective language learning. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes directly influence their choices of implementation, and those beliefs can inspire and modify their practices (Lan & Lam, 2020). The use of authentic materials and context-specific strategies is among the fundamental approaches adopted by EFL teachers. These strategies have shown promise in improving speaking proficiency, promoting fluency, accuracy, and learner confidence.

METHOD

As this research aims to uncover teachers' use of teaching speaking strategies and the reasons for their decision to use them, a qualitative method is initiated in this research. Qualitative research is a research approach that focuses on conceptualizing human experiences and perceptions within the educational context. Certainly,

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phenomenology design is used in this research because it is a social phenomenon study that describes the essence of the experience as well as a detailed description of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014).

This research was conducted at Telkom Vocational High School in Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan. This school is preferred due to the school's specific demands and vision of students' English skills, which lead the teacher to take a severe path for teaching. Another reason for having this school is its status as the Ministry of Education and Culture established it as the only *Sekolah Menengah Keguruan Pusat Keunggulan (SMK PK)* in the field of information technology in South Kalimantan.

Concerning the subjects of the study, the researchers elected two English teachers at this vocational school. These teachers were chosen based on their qualifications in teaching English. They are all Department of English Education graduates, and one has a Magister's degree. They have already been teaching English for over a decade, giving them more experience and broad expertise in their field.

Observations and interviews were used to collect the data. Firstly, the researchers did non-participatory observation, where the researchers observed the subjects in the setting. While observing the subjects, the researchers took field notes. In light of the observation, the researchers conducted in-person interviews with them to collect information about the teachers' speaking teaching strategies and why the teachers used them.

The data was then analyzed to find the answer to the research questions. Finally, the researchers drew clear and accurate conclusions from the interview results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The First Teacher

The first teacher has a Master's degree in English Language Education. She has been teaching at the school for nine years and continues to do so. Apart from working as an English teacher, she works as a university instructor and tutor. Overall, she had been teaching for over a decade and gained much experience.

The first part of the interview focused on how vital speaking skill is to be

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mastered by Vocational High School students. She started with the teacher's role as an educator, where they have to be able to meet the needs of students. She emphasized that it is essential for high school students, especially Telkom Vocational High School, to master English. Basically, vocational high school graduates have the potential with *BMW* (*Belajar, Melanjutkan, Wirausaha*). Vocational students are equipped with various competencies according to their expertise. That way, they are ready to enter the world of work and entrepreneurship. The students who wish to continue their education to a higher level also have the opportunity widely open. She added that the standard for vocational high school graduates now is being able to communicate at the intermediate level. The scope for *BMW* is now more than just at the local level, but already refers to the national and international levels. Then, she highlighted that in the school, the provision or in-depth teaching of speaking skills for their students is very influential for their future.

In correlation with that, she accorded the best treatment to her classes to get the expected result. This was where she talked about the importance of suitable strategies in teaching English. She depicted strategy as a weapon for teachers. The use of strategy made it easier for her to teach. Was when she used strategies that suited the needs of students, especially in managing how to speak in English. The role of the teacher as a facilitator is expected to be able to understand the appropriate strategies to support the success of learning achievement indicators. Students' characteristics were also considered when she was choosing the strategy. Thus, there will be several steps before she decides which strategy to use. She also mentioned it suggested using assessment to see students' levels of ability in speaking. Therefore, she believes that the decision to implement one or more teaching strategies must be considered and adjusted for all students. Finally, she chose the strategies based on the assessment that was carried out at the beginning of the lesson.

Speaking of strategies, when being asked about what strategy she used for teaching speaking, she pointed out that it was the *Fishbowl* strategy which she believed focused heavily on students' needs. She underlined that this strategy trains and motivates students to be confident in conveying information. This strategy helped her to give the students freedom to express their opinions. In later stages, she

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explained how she implemented this strategy. She always starts by learning the characteristics of each student through an assessment. Furthermore, she matched the subject matter that required students' speaking skills and included them in the lesson plan. While in class, she forms several groups of students with a circle shape of the chairs layout. Then, she asked five or more students to fill each *aquarium*. In the next stage, she also highlighted the use of supporting media in this strategy, namely, cue cards placed in a box. Lastly, she allowed students to take one cue card and elaborate on the topics they received. When one student had a turn to speak, the others could help by writing down additional information or listening while their friends said it.

Using the *Fishbowl* strategy was promising enough for her. Apparently, it was like killing two birds with one stone, which she justified by referring to this strategy's advantages like involving all students, for instance, with topics that interest them in speaking. She also emphasized that this strategy allows her to map students' abilities, considering that other skills such as writing and listening are also affected apart from speaking skills. This strategy also drills their self-leadership and a sense of responsibility for what they say. They can elaborate on existing data and even be supported by relevant sources. Attuned to her experience while using the strategy, she said if it can be counted, this strategy has met her expectations by about 85%.

The Second Teacher

The second teacher had eight years of experience in teaching English. She graduated in English Language Education and is continuing her Master's degree. Besides working as a vocational school teacher, she taught junior high school levels.

The teacher's experience in teaching at different levels was the starting point for this interview. Indubitably, she began, teaching in vocational and junior high schools can be very different in the aspects of the curriculum, student population, and teaching strategy. At junior high school, she typically provided a more general curriculum covering English subjects. On the other hand, her instruction at vocational high schools usually offers English language programs according to students' majors in technology. She continued that vocational high school students may have attended the school to pursue a career in that field. Regarding that and the significance of

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speaking skills for vocational high school students, she agreed that it is essential and will benefit them in the future.

Her way of assisting students with their speaking skills was by using a suitable teaching strategy. After years of teaching, she learned she could not just use any strategy to teach speaking. There were a lot of trials and errors before she found the best strategy for her students. She believed that choosing a suitable strategy provides opportunities for students to practice speaking in a supportive environment, using appropriate and exciting topics, and giving constructive feedback, making students more likely to feel confident in expressing themselves in the target language. As an outcome, she shared her two strategies when teaching vocational high school students speaking skills namely *Role-play* and *Storytelling*.

Her pick on the role-playing strategy was when the material was about *Announcements*. She assigned various roles to students and instructed them to act out a scenario or situation. The roles included flight announcer, radio announcer, and host. To her surprise, many students enjoyed the teaching-learning process which increased its effectiveness. She also stated that this strategy was an exciting and engaging platform for students to practice speaking. By observing students' performance in a role-play scenario, she can evaluate their ability to use the language in a real-life context. It greatly aided her in identifying areas where students may require additional support and providing feedback on their progress.

She moved on to the following strategy, *Storytelling*. She selected this strategy in teaching narrative texts. She asked her students to choose or create a story that they could retell. Because she teaches Animation Class, she also requested the students to draw pictures related to the story they selected. Using this strategy, she established a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment for her students. She also discovered that storytelling could be an engaging and interactive way to introduce new vocabulary, expressions, and grammar. Her observations of the students revealed that when language patterns and vocabulary were given in a fun way, they were likely to be remembered. Additionally, this strategy also helped her students develop their listening comprehension skills. When the other students told stories, those who heard were exposed to various accents, intonations, and speech patterns

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which improved their understanding of spoken language.

The results were satisfactory enough to her. At a certain point, she was sure that some students had improved their speaking skills. She revealed that some students previously needed more confidence to speak. After implementing those strategies, her students actively participated and became more confident in speaking. Moreover, she also highlighted her purpose: that she can enrich the students' vocabularies in terms of their majors. Therefore, she added, using suitable strategies in teaching speaking can bring numerous benefits to learners.

Discussion

According to the results of the subjects' interviews, both teachers agreed that vocational high school students must master speaking skills. As the first teacher mentioned concerning the *BMW* concept, vocational high school graduates must be able to communicate complex technical information to colleagues, clients, or customers, as employees. This is especially true for students in vocational high schools who are preparing for jobs that require a high degree of technical expertise and interpersonal communication. They can compete with success in their chosen profession by improving their speaking skills, allowing them to survive in this global market (Rao, 2019).

To support students' development in learning English language skills, English teachers play a vital role. This necessitates the ability of teachers to employ suitable strategies to aid students' development in speaking English (BOUZAR, 2019). The depiction of the first teacher perfectly illustrates it wherein she reveals that to achieve the desired outcome, she gives the best treatment to the students. Notably, when she taught speaking skills, there was much consideration before she could finally decide which strategy would be the most beneficial. The same thought came from the second teacher. Her awareness of the different levels of students greatly influences her teaching style. So, at the vocational high school level, she provides appropriate teaching to meet the success in students' speaking ability while enriching their technical terms (Mahbub, 2018).

In addition, both teachers adjusted to the student's needs, characteristics, level

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of speaking ability, subject matter, and lesson plans for their choice of speaking strategy. It became evident that their expertise and years of teaching experience are critical in helping students develop the speaking skills required to thrive in academic and professional settings. In consonance with the theory, Lan & Lam (2020) state that teachers' strategies are directly determined by teaching experiences as their beliefs and practices. Based on the results, the teachers used *Fishbowl*, *Role-play*, and *Storytelling* to teach speaking which they believe can boost students' motivation and participation in learning.

The first strategy, *Fishbowl*, was taught by the first teacher. According to Yustiati et al. (2015), *Fishbowl* is a strategy for organizing medium- to large-group discussions. She asked the students to gather inside the *Fishbowl* to actively engage in a discussion by asking questions and sharing their opinions while the other students carefully listened to the ideas offered. Students alternate between these positions to practice being both speakers and listeners in a group discussion. The first teacher suggested this strategy to ensure that all students participate and confidently speak in a discussion. She also stated that the *Fishbowl* strategy could help students develop leadership skills because it fosters student-centered awareness. In *Fishbowl*, she shared that as a teacher, she had the opportunity to hear students' experiences, ideas, and feedback. Besides, students had the opportunity to participate in speaking on the topics chosen and hear other students' ideas.

The following strategies are, from the second teacher, *Role-play* and *Storytelling*. *Role-play* (Rahayu, 2015) is a technique that involves students taking on a role and carrying out a discussion with each person playing their role. When the second teacher implemented the role-play scenarios, some students choose to act like announcers. Furthermore, it excited them to participate in the speaking activity. By engaging in *Role-play*, students can develop their communication skills by practicing the language and expressions relevant to the situation. This can help her to build students' confidence and fluency in speaking. A similar finding by Hasibuan et al. (2022) found that through *role-playing*, students can be creative and fluent in the roles they get. Therefore, she encouraged *role-play* as one of the speaking strategies that can be used in their language teaching practice.

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The last strategy is *Storytelling*. The second teacher also had a positive experience when she implemented it. She knew that asking the students to do *Storytelling* might make them bored quickly, so she asked her students from the Animation major to draw anything related to their story. It surprised her that the students became more active in doing the *Storytelling*. The same case (Hasibuan et al., 2022) also found that students have various opportunities to assimilate knowledge and improve their speaking skills using this strategy. From this strategy, she asserted the benefits she found. Besides making the students actively participate in speaking, it also helped them to train their skills for the Animation major.

According to the analysis results, the teaching speaking strategies used by the teachers are variously adjusted to their students. The teachers went through various long processes until they finally found the most suitable strategy for the students. In this case, *Fishbowl*, *Role-play*, and *Storytelling* were found to be suitable for use by teachers. Both teachers met their success in improving students' speaking skills by using those strategies.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the results, it is concluded that the teaching speaking strategies used by the teachers can be acknowledged as effective in meeting the expectations. Students variously benefit from each strategy. *Fishbowl* encourages class members to interact verbally to think critically about issues and express their opinions. It also made the students speak more confidently with their group company. *Role-play* is the following strategy; it allows students to practice speaking in a real-life context, encourages collaboration and interaction, and is a fun and engaging way to learn. Finally, *Storytelling* is a fun and interactive method to introduce new vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical structures while also helping students improve their speaking knowledge. The teachers chose those strategies based on the students' needs, characteristics, level of speaking ability, subject matter, and lesson plans.

However, due to subject limitations, the strategies discovered in the recent research could be more extensive. Thereby, the researchers propose a further study on a larger scale topic with other factual new problems to be used as a reference for

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teachers, particularly vocational teachers, in using various teaching strategies.

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