



ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT SMK NEGERI 1 BENGKAYANG

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the implementation of communicative activities in English language teaching at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang and their impact on students' speaking skills. As a vocational school, SMK students are expected to acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also practical communication skills, particularly in English, to meet workplace demands. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method involving classroom observation, teacher interviews, and student feedback. The results show that communicative language teaching (CLT) strategies, including role-plays, presentations, and interactive games, effectively encourage students to speak more confidently in English. However, limited speaking practice time and low self-confidence remain challenges. The findings prove that by fostering a positive and engaging learning environment, communicative activities greatly improve speaking abilities among SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang students. To improve student motivation, extend practice time, and further incorporate English into practical topics, more work is necessary. To increase the efficacy of English instruction in vocational contexts, it is advised that teachers get ongoing training and that curricula be modified.

Keywords: English language teaching, speaking skills, communicative activities, vocational education, SMK

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become a crucial skill for vocational school graduates, especially for those aiming to enter the global workforce. At SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, English is taught not only as a subject but as a tool to support students' professional competencies. Developing students' speaking skills is essential, yet many face challenges due to lack of exposure and limited opportunities for practice. Therefore, applying communicative and student-centered teaching strategies becomes a vital approach.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), speaking is considered one of the most essential skills for effective communication. As one of the productive language skills, speaking allows learners to express their thoughts, interact with others, and participate in real-life communication. However, in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, including Indonesia, students often face significant challenges in developing their speaking proficiency. These challenges include lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, low confidence, limited exposure to authentic language use, and teacher-centered classroom practices.

At SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, speaking remains a difficult skill for many students to master. Based on preliminary observations and discussions with English teachers, it was found that students tend to be passive during speaking activities and often respond with short or memorized answers. Many of them are reluctant to speak in English due to anxiety and fear of being judged by peers. In

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In addition, the teaching approach used in the classroom is often dominated by grammar translation or reading-based methods, which do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to practice speaking meaningfully.

English has become the global language of communication, playing a pivotal role in international business, education, technology, and cross-cultural exchange. In Indonesia, the government recognizes the importance of English as a foreign language by integrating it into the national curriculum from elementary to secondary education levels. For vocational schools such as SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, English proficiency—particularly speaking skills—is not only vital for academic achievement but also for preparing students to enter the workforce, especially in sectors that demand communication with international clients or partners.

Despite the recognized importance of speaking skills, many Indonesian students still struggle to communicate effectively in English. Studies show that speaking is often considered the most difficult skill to master due to its spontaneous nature and the psychological pressure it imposes, such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and limited vocabulary. These challenges are compounded in classroom environments where teaching methods remain traditional and teacher-centered, emphasizing grammar and written exercises over oral communication. In such contexts, students have few opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful and interactive ways.

At SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, a similar pattern can be observed. Preliminary observations and interviews with teachers reveal that while students are generally motivated to learn English, they often remain passive in speaking activities. The limited use of communicative approaches in the classroom results in minimal student talk time and low engagement. As vocational school students are expected to develop practical language skills applicable in real-life situations, this gap between teaching practices and learner needs becomes a critical issue.

One promising approach to address these issues is the use of communicative activities in English Language Teaching (ELT). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes interaction as both the means and ultimate goal of learning a language. Activities such as role plays, interviews, group discussions, simulations, storytelling, and games help to foster a dynamic learning environment in which students are encouraged to speak spontaneously and meaningfully. These activities not only develop students' fluency and accuracy but also build their confidence and reduce their anxiety.

Integrating communicative activities into the classroom is particularly relevant for SMK students, who are expected to be job-ready upon graduation. Enhancing speaking skills through such activities can better equip them with the communication competencies required in various professional settings such as hospitality, tourism, marketing, and customer service. Moreover, communicative activities can also cultivate critical soft skills such as teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving.

Given the importance of speaking skills for vocational school students and the potential of communicative activities to improve these skills, this study aims to explore how such activities can be effectively implemented in English classrooms at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang. It seeks to identify suitable types of communicative activities, examine the challenges faced by both teachers and students in their application, and measure the impact of these activities on students' speaking performance. The outcomes of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for English teachers, school administrators, and curriculum developers in designing more effective and engaging language learning experiences for vocational school learners.

To address these issues, communicative activities have been increasingly recommended as effective strategies in English language teaching. Communicative activities such as role-plays, group discussions, interviews, games, and problem-solving tasks are designed to engage students in authentic communication. These activities provide students with opportunities to use English actively, encourage collaboration, reduce anxiety, and foster a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. By creating a student-centered environment, communicative activities can potentially enhance students' confidence and competence in speaking English.

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This study aims to explore how communicative activities can be implemented effectively to enhance students' speaking skills in the context of SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang. It investigates the types of communicative activities that are most suitable for vocational high school students, examines the challenges faced in their implementation, and evaluates the improvement of students' speaking performance. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more interactive and communicative approaches in English teaching, particularly in vocational school settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes real-life communication and student interaction in the learning process (Richards, 2006). According to Harmer (2007), CLT focuses on fluency over accuracy and encourages students to use English in meaningful contexts. Vocational students, in particular, benefit from contextualized and task-based language instruction that mirrors workplace communication (Widodo, 2015).

Speaking is one of the productive language skills that plays a vital role in communication. According to Brown (2007), speaking is a process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. It involves not only linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, but also paralinguistic features such as intonation, stress, and gestures.

Harmer (2007) emphasizes that speaking is more than simply producing sounds or uttering words it requires the ability to communicate ideas clearly, interactively, and appropriately. In the context of vocational schools like SMK, speaking becomes essential for preparing students to engage in real-life communication and workplace interactions.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a response to traditional methods like grammar-translation and audiolingualism, which focused more on accuracy than fluency. Richards (2006) defines CLT as an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction and the use of language in real communicative situations.

Key features of CLT include: Emphasis on communication and meaning rather than form, Learner-centered instruction, Activities such as pair work, group discussions, role-plays, and task-based learning, and Assessment based on communicative competence, not just grammatical accuracy. Communicative activities are designed to create authentic language use in the classroom, encouraging learners to actively speak and interact.

According to Kayi (2006), effective communicative activities to promote speaking skills include Role Play: Students act out roles in specific situations (e.g., customer and cashier, teacher and student). Information Gap, students possess different pieces of information and must communicate to complete the task. Interview, students conduct interviews with classmates or guests using guided questions. Discussion/Debate, students express and defend opinions in group discussions, and storytelling, students narrate stories or experiences based on pictures or prompts.

Ur (1996) supports that these activities enhance not only speaking fluency but also students' confidence to speak spontaneously in English.

Teaching English in vocational high schools (SMK) differs from general high schools due to its focus on practical and functional language use. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education (Kemdikbud, 2022), the *Merdeka Curriculum* emphasizes Functional English, which equips students with language skills for work-related communication.

Challenges still exist, such as low student motivation, limited time for speaking practice, and varied proficiency levels. Communicative activities, therefore, serve as essential tools to engage students actively and provide meaningful language practice.

Several studies have shown the effectiveness of communicative activities in enhancing students' speaking skills. Al-Tamimi (2014) found that using role plays and group discussions significantly improved fluency and confidence among technical college students in Saudi Arabia. In the Indonesian context, Yuliani & Hartatik (2020) conducted a study at SMK Negeri 1 Palembang, which concluded that consistent implementation of CLT can improve students' speaking performance

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and classroom participation. Their findings align with other research recommending the integration of simulation, pair work, and interactive dialogue in lesson plans.

Based on the literature above, speaking is a vital skill that should be prioritized in vocational English instruction. The CLT approach and its related communicative activities have been proven effective in promoting speaking fluency, interaction, and learner autonomy.

At SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, the application of communicative activities is expected to provide a more engaging, relevant, and practical environment for students to improve their speaking ability in English.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang with 20 eleventh-grade students from the accounting department and two English teachers. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews with teachers, and analysis of students' speaking tasks and performance. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed several positive impacts of using communicative activities in teaching English: Improved student engagement: Interactive tasks such as role-playing and group discussions increased student participation. Increased speaking confidence: Students showed more willingness to speak English, especially during presentations and dialogues. Challenges faced: Some students were still hesitant due to fear of making mistakes. In addition, the time allocated for speaking practice was insufficient for all students to actively participate. Teachers also emphasized the need for more teaching materials that integrate English into students' vocational contexts (e.g., job interviews, customer service, technical explanations).

The initial observation and teacher interview revealed several challenges. Limited Student Confidence: Many students felt shy and hesitant to speak in English due to fear of making mistakes.. Lack of Practice Opportunities: The speaking component received less focus compared to grammar and reading. Large Class Size: Teachers found it difficult to give every student speaking time due to class size (35–40 students per class). Vocabulary Deficiency: Students often struggled to express ideas due to limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation.

These challenges indicated the need for more dynamic, student-centered, and supportive speaking practice. During the intervention, the teacher incorporated the following communicative activities into the lessons. Role Play: Students performed dialogues based on real-life scenarios (e.g., job interviews, hotel reservations). Information Gap Activities, students worked in pairs to complete missing information through dialogue. Group Discussions, small groups discussed everyday topics such as hobbies, dreams, or school rules. Storytelling, students narrated personal experiences or described a picture sequence. Interview Projects, students created and conducted short interviews with classmates.

Each activity was adapted to suit the students' English proficiency and vocational background. Data from speaking assessments (pre-test and post-test) and teacher evaluation showed noticeable improvements in. Fluency: Students were more fluent and less hesitant during conversations. Pronunciation and Intonation: Many students improved their clarity and natural tone. Vocabulary Use: Students began using more varied vocabulary appropriate to the topics. Coherence: Students could express ideas more logically and clearly. For example, one student who could only answer in single words during the pre-test was able to produce full sentences and engage in a short conversation by the end of the intervention.

CONCLUSION

Communicative activities significantly enhance speaking skills among SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang students by creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. However, further

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efforts are needed to increase practice time, boost student motivation, and integrate English more deeply into vocational subjects. Continuous teacher training and curriculum adaptation are recommended to improve the effectiveness of English instruction in vocational settings.

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