Exploring EFL Students in Peer-Assisted Practice Using Online Dictionary : A Case Study in Speaking Classroom

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Abstract

This qualitative research explores peer-assisted learning strategies in vocational school settings, focusing on students' challenges and perceptions in practicing English pronunciation. The study addresses the need for effective speaking skills among vocational students, considering linguistic differences and the influence of mother tongue. Through a case study approach involving multimedia majors, data was collected via classroom observations and structured interviews, analyzed thematically to reveal insights into students' use of online dictionaries and their perceptions of peer assistance. To examine the impact of peer-assisted strategies on English pronunciation skills and collaborative learning perceptions among vocational students. Utilizing qualitative case study design with multimedia students, data collected through observations and interviews highlighted reliance on online dictionaries and varied peer capabilities. Students actively use online dictionaries to enhance pronunciation and collaborative learning. Challenges include peer capabilities and individual learning preferences affecting strategy effectiveness. Peer-assisted strategies, coupled with technology, significantly improve vocational students' English pronunciation. Effective integration requires tailored support and flexible methodologies. Educators should enhance peer-support skills, design collaborative activities, and leverage technology for optimal language learning outcomes.

Keywords: English Pronunciation; Peer-Assisted Learning; Technology; Vocational Education

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language can be challenging due to differences in phonemes and accents, affecting pronunciation abilities (AbdAlgane & Idris, 2020; Elumalai et al., 2021). However, consistent practice and tutor assistance can improve pronunciation abilities (Aisyah et al., 2023; Gordon, 2023). Vocational school students need help in pronouncing English vocabulary because their mother tongue and differences in linguistic structure, culture, and habits influence their abilities (Bahri & Sitorus, 2022; Fitri et al., 2023). Therefore, more frequent pronunciation practice is necessary (Gordon, 2023).

Students in Indonesia tend to use their mother tongue, which limits their English practice and causes pronunciation difficulties. Correct pronunciation is essential for effective communication and reducing misunderstandings (Ehri, 2022; Lee et al., 2021). It also helps develop social skills and opens up academic and professional opportunities (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Srakaew, 2021). However, local research on peer assistance in speaking classes still needs to be improved. International research shows that peer assistance increases students' learning awareness and speaking confidence (Galullo, 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Martin & Sippel, 2021).

Peer assistance strategies can help students improve pronunciation, build positive speaking habits, and increase self-confidence. In addition, this strategy enriches teaching methods by

considering cultural experiences and relevant idiomatic expressions. Social support through this strategy creates a positive learning environment, encourages students to practice without fear of judgment, and increases motivation to learn a foreign language.

Hung and other researchers (2016) integrated inter-participant assessment into English oral presentations, showing that during the inter-participant assessment process, acting as a teacher motivates student assessors to assess pretty and improve their performance by reflecting on what they have learned from classmate work and feedback. Additionally, Yastıbaş and Yastıbaş (2015) reported that involving EFL students in peer-to-peer assessments can reduce their English learning anxiety because they can see classmates' mistakes and therefore consider making mistakes as part of learning; in addition, during the inter-participant assessment process, students felt that feedback from classmates as well as seeing their work was helpful for them to improve their writing skills, making the learning environment less anxious and stressful. This research uses a qualitative approach to fill the gap in the literature. It examines peer-assisted learning strategies in speaking classes, providing a deeper understanding of students' challenges in practicing and pronouncing English vocabulary.

METHOD

Researchers chose qualitative methods for this research because the suitability of the methodology to the research problem greatly determines the validity of the results (Asenahabi, 2019). A case study was chosen as the research design because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex aspects of the problem through multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). Research will be conducted in vocational schools, especially for students majoring in multimedia, to explore peer-assisted strategies in learning to speak English. The selection of participants was based on research trends in Indonesia that are still under-explored in the context of peer-editing in speaking classes in vocational schools. Good pronunciation skills are essential for vocational school students to prepare for their future in the industrial world (Ehri, 2022). This research uses two data sources: primary data from classroom observations and secondary data from in-depth and structured interviews to assist triangulation. Observations were carried out at every meeting in the English class, adapted from Motallebzadeh and Asa'di (2013), and interviews were carried out at the last meeting, adapted from Birdwell et al. (2016). The researcher acted as an observer, observing a class of 10 multimedia majors during the learning process, focusing on student engagement and behavior. According to the Braun & Clarke (2022) framework, the data analysis method used is thematic analysis, which helps identify, analyze, and reveal patterns (themes) in the data to obtain in-depth and meaningful results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Students' Pronunciation Skills in Peer-Assisted Practice Using an Online Dictionary

Through observations, researchers found that participants often utilized technology such as online dictionaries when learning to speak using peer assistance strategies. Interviews with research participants also support these findings. The following are the relevant interview results.

> S1 : I often use online dictionary. It is make it easy for me to learn English pronunciation and to know the unfamiliar terms.
> S2 : Every time when I learn English, I will use Google Translate because it is easier and faster

S3 : I am very often using online dictionary, because when I found the unfamiliar word, I can search the meaning and also know the pronounced it.

S4 : I very often use online dictionaries because in every English lesson I always use them because of difficulties

S5 : Exactly, I always use online dictionary in the English lesson and tests

Research shows that students actively use online dictionaries in English learning, with all participants reporting intense use. They rely on this technology to overcome language difficulties, understand the meaning of words, and improve pronunciation skills. The use of online dictionaries not only better prepares students for lessons and exams but also supports collaborative learning through peer assistance strategies, significantly impacting learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, researchers also noted in the observation results that students tend to make corrections and learn independently. For example, when students make a mistake, they ask for help from their friends to correct it. If neither party can pronounce it correctly, they will work together using an online dictionary to find the correct pronunciation. The results of interviews with research participants strengthen this finding.

S1 : I usually learn again and again. I will repeat the vocabulary which I hard to pronounce.

S2 : I asked my peer when I didn't know the pronounce of vocabulary or taking a break first. Then, I will learn again

S3 : I asked or discussed with my peer to know the pronounce of the vocabulary. When, she/he had difficult in saying it, we will search together on online dictionary.

S4 : I will repeat to pronounce it until I can pronounce it

S5 : I prefer to use an online dictionary to know the pronunciation. Due to my friends also having difficult in pronounce the vocabulary. I listen the pronunciation sounds from the dictionary.

The data above reveals how students face challenges in pronouncing English words, showing their outstanding efforts to avoid mistakes in pronunciation. Students such as S1 and S4 repeated difficult words until they could pronounce them correctly, showing their dedication to achieving correct pronunciation. On the other hand, S2 and S3 preferred asking peers for help, reflecting the importance of social support and collaborative learning in the learning process. When peers also experience difficulties, they look for solutions using online dictionaries, as revealed by S3 and S5. S5 was more likely to use an online dictionary to hear the correct pronunciation, especially when facing the same difficulties as his friend. Overall, these findings highlight the combination of individual and collaborative strategies that students use to overcome pronunciation challenges and their reliance on technology as an effective aid in improving their language skills.

Research also shows that students rely heavily on online dictionaries when learning English because of their ease of access, speed, and pronunciation assistance. They demonstrate independence in searching for the meaning and pronunciation of words and rely on technology to overcome language barriers. This approach improves their preparation for studying and exams and encourages collaborative learning through peer assistance. The integration of this technology into teaching methodology can have a significant positive impact on student learning outcomes by effectively addressing pronunciation challenges.

Students' Perceptions of Peer-Assisted Practice
The researcher found several student perceptions regarding learning to speak using peer-assisted strategies. Students stated that this learning strategy involved discussions with peers. The findings are in line with the results of the following interview.

> S1 : I think peer-assisted strategy is learning process with peers. Furthermore, the strategy can build our cooperative and easily to work with pair.
> S2 : With peer-assisted strategy, I can easily ask and discuss with my peers regarding the pronunciation. It helps for me.
> S5 : The learning strategy with peers to build our knowledge and discussion

The research findings indicated that students had positive perceptions of using peer-assisted strategies to enhance their speaking skills. Participants like S1 and S5 viewed these strategies as opportunities for collaborative learning, fostering cooperation and facilitating pair work effectively. They valued the chance to expand their knowledge through active discussions with classmates. S2 also found benefit in quickly seeking and discussing word pronunciation with peers, which contributed to improving their English-speaking abilities. These positive perceptions underscored the effectiveness of peer-assisted strategies in promoting collaborative learning in the classroom. By leveraging peer support, students were able to enhance their speaking skills and gain confidence in using English actively. These findings suggest that integrating peer assistance in speaking instruction can create a supportive and dynamic learning environment, significantly enhancing students' interpersonal skills.

Additionally, observations revealed that students tended to engage in independent learning using online dictionaries. These observations were corroborated in interviews with research participants.

> S1 : I think my peer is as helper for me. It is due to I often asked my peer how to pronounce it, and we can discuss and search together if we both don't know it.
> S2 : I think nothing, I prefer to use my online dictionary than ask friends. Because mostly they are same like me which could not speak fluently. So just rely on tools.
> S3 : I am still learning on my own, I am worried my friend and I have mistaken due to unknown the correct pronunciation it.
> S4 : So far so good, because I often ask each other if there is a pronunciation that is difficult to pronounce. If we didn't know, we look for it together via online dictionary
> S5 : Nothing, it's rare because we all have difficulties and can't speak English

The research findings depict varying student perceptions regarding the role of peers in speaking learning through peer-assisted strategies. Students like S1 perceive peers as valuable helpers who aid in understanding words, often asking classmates about word pronunciation and collaboratively finding solutions when neither knows the meaning. In contrast, S2 prefers relying on online dictionaries over asking peers, considering classmates may also struggle with fluent English and thus favoring technological aids. S3 tends towards self-directed learning and concerns over mispronouncing unfamiliar words, while S4 finds significant benefits in asking peers about challenging words. Conversely, S5 feels frequent need for assistance in speaking English, perceiving minimal contribution from peers in learning. In conclusion, students' perceptions of peer roles in speaking learning vary widely, from valuing them as helpful aides to relying more on tools like online dictionaries. Effective management of peer-assisted strategies can facilitate beneficial collaboration among students in overcoming challenges in speaking English.

Simultaneously, researchers found that students experience challenges in learning to speak using peer-assisted strategies. These challenges stem from internal factors where students prefer using online dictionaries over reviewing or discussing with peers. The following interview data corroborates these observations.

S1 : Sometimes my friend also don't understand or don't know how to pronounce and mean the vocabulary so we both don't know, so she/he have to check again in an online dictionary
S2 : My friend sometimes can't be invited to collaborate, and not everyone can do that. So we have to study again together
S3 : It's difficult to discuss because my friend is still equally unable to do it, and I also feel happier if it's an individual assignment
S4 : Usually, when I ask questions, both of us are confused or don't know
S5 : My friend don't understand and can't cooperate

The research findings identified several challenges students encountered when using peer-assisted strategies for speaking learning, particularly regarding peers' capabilities, cooperation, and individual learning preferences. S1 and S4 highlighted instances where peers struggled with pronunciation or understanding, necessitating a return to online dictionaries for answers and hindering the learning process. Moreover, S2 and S5 noted difficulties in effective group work among classmates, requiring additional study sessions and complicating peer-assisted learning efforts. S3 emphasized challenges in collaborating with peers who had not mastered the material, preferring solitary tasks, indicating that peer-assisted strategies may not suit all students, especially those with distinct individual learning styles.

These challenges underscore the need for adjustments and support in implementing peer-assisted strategies. Strategies such as providing training for students to enhance their peer-support skills, designing activities to foster collaboration, offering flexible teaching methods, and integrating technology effectively could help mitigate these barriers. By addressing these challenges, a more conducive and supportive learning environment can be cultivated for all students engaged in speaking learning.

Discussion

Students' Pronunciation Skills in Peer-Assisted Practice Using an Online Dictionary

This research shows that students frequently use online dictionaries in English learning, with all participants reporting a high frequency of use. The use of online dictionaries is driven by ease and speed of access, the ability to overcome language difficulties, and the need to learn to pronounce unknown words. Students demonstrate independence in searching for words' meanings and pronunciations but rely on technology to overcome linguistic challenges. Online dictionaries help students prepare for lessons and exams, develop pronunciation skills, and support collaborative learning through peer assistance strategies.

These behaviors reflect individual and collaborative strategies for overcoming pronunciation challenges. For example, some students repeated difficult words until they could pronounce them correctly, showing persistence. In contrast, others preferred to ask friends for help, showing the importance of social support and collaboration. When peers experience difficulties, they use online dictionaries together, demonstrating a reliance on technology and collaboration to improve speaking skills. This finding is consistent with Zhao and Lai (2023), who showed that technology in language learning can overcome linguistic barriers and facilitate more effective interactions between students. Ghavifekr (2020) also shows that collaborative learning improves learning outcomes and interpersonal relationships. The use of technology, such as online dictionaries in peer assistance strategies, has proven effective in creating a dynamic and supportive learning environment and increasing motivation and understanding of the material (Adara & Haqiyah, 2021).

Students' Perceptions of Peer-Assisted Practice

This research illustrates how peer assistance strategies in learning to speak English influence students' perceptions of the teaching and learning context, learning achievement, and strategy. The results showed that most students found this strategy effective in improving their speaking skills, viewing collaboration with classmates as an opportunity to expand understanding through active discussion and social support (Wentzel et al., 2010). These strategies help create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where students feel more confident using English in everyday interactions, strengthen learning motivation, and increase achievement in achieving English learning goals such as effective communication and overcoming speaking challenges (Huseinović, 2023). However, challenges such as differences in abilities between classmates and individual learning preferences may influence the effectiveness of this strategy (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, an integrated approach and appropriate support from educators are needed to optimize the benefits of peer assistance strategies in learning to speak English.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the efficacy of peer-assisted strategies in enhancing vocational students' English speaking skills despite challenges in peer capabilities and individual learning preferences. Online dictionaries are crucial tools for overcoming linguistic barriers and fostering collaborative learning. Integration of peer-assisted strategies into teaching practices promotes inclusive and supportive learning environments, essential for students' language proficiency and interpersonal development. Ongoing research and refinement of teaching methodologies are critical for maximizing the potential of these strategies in diverse educational settings.

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