An Analysis of Teacher's Strategies in Teaching English Speaking at Vocational High School

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategies employed by an English teacher in teaching speaking to eleventh-grade students at SMK Assa'adah Bungah Gresik and to describe the students' responses toward those strategies. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through classroom observations, student questionnaires, and documentation. The findings reveal that the teacher applied various strategies such as group discussions, storytelling, drilling, simulations, oral presentations, and communication games to support speaking skill development. Among these, group discussions and communication games were the most frequently used, while simulations and storytelling appeared less often. Students responded positively to interactive activities that encouraged participation and made learning enjoyable. They reported improved confidence, fluency, and motivation when engaged in group-based or game-like speaking tasks. Documentation, including photos and lesson materials, confirmed the application of these strategies in classroom practice. The study concludes that communicative and student-centered approaches are effective in enhancing students' speaking abilities when applied consistently and contextually. These results suggest that incorporating a variety of engaging speaking strategies can support English language development in vocational high school.

Keywords: Teaching Strategies; Speaking Skills; Student Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential yet challenging skills in learning English as a foreign language. It allows learners to communicate ideas, express emotions, and interact effectively in both formal and informal contexts (Brown, 2006). As a productive and performative skill, speaking is closely tied to fluency, accuracy, and the ability to respond appropriately in real-time communication. According to Nunan (2003), speaking involves not only the correct production of sounds and words but also awareness of the social and cultural contexts in which communication occurs. It also requires active listening and cognitive processing, making it one of the most complex language skills to master. However, students' speaking ability can improve significantly when supported by effective instructional strategies, as demonstrated by Shofi & Masruroh (2018)

In the Indonesian educational context, English is a compulsory subject in both junior and senior high schools, including vocational high schools (SMK). However, the teaching of speaking often receives less emphasis compared to reading and writing. English teachers typically have only one to two hours per week to cover all four skills, leading to a tendency to prioritize written skills and grammar. As a result, speaking is frequently marginalized, and learners are given few opportunities to practice oral communication in meaningful ways. This situation is particularly evident in vocational schools, where students often face unique challenges in language acquisition due to differing academic orientations, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and varied levels of motivation.

Students at SMK Assa'adah Bungah Gresik, for instance, commonly struggle with speaking due to several factors. These include limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and anxiety about being judged by peers (Purwati et al., 2023). Hasibuan et al., (2022) also argues that language anxiety and low self-confidence are major inhibitors of oral performance, especially when students are not accustomed to speaking English in front of others. In addition, some students may not see the immediate relevance of English to their vocational field, which lowers intrinsic motivation and classroom participation.

To overcome these obstacles, effective speaking instruction must involve engaging strategies that reduce anxiety, build confidence, and provide learners with authentic speaking practice. According to Asworo (2019), speaking strategies must not only promote fluency but also encourage student interaction and collaboration. These strategies include role-play, simulation, group discussion, storytelling, drilling, oral presentations, and communication games (Syafrizal & Rohmawati, 2017). Wardani & Zakiyah (2021) emphasize that such strategies help students become more actively involved in the learning process and create a more supportive learning environment. However, the selection and implementation of these strategies must be adapted to students' needs, language proficiency, and classroom dynamics (Robert & Pane, 2020).

Previous research in various Indonesian schools has identified diverse strategies used by teachers to enhance speaking skills. For example, Saputra et al., (2023) found that teachers at MAN 2 Palembang integrated storytelling, brainstorming, role-plays, and group discussions to encourage verbal communication. Similarly, Kurniawan et al., (2022) documented nine strategies used at SMA Negeri 1 Bungo, with an emphasis on practice-based activities. Widianita (2023) reported the use of discovery learning and cooperative strategies such as small group discussions, three-step interviews, and project-based learning at SMK PGRI 2 Kediri. While these studies provide valuable insights into instructional strategies, they often focus on academic-track schools or assume general classroom conditions, leaving a gap in research regarding vocational school contexts where learners may have different learning goals and engagement levels. Moreover, while communicative approaches are widely advocated, their actual implementation remains inconsistent. Teachers may be aware of interactive strategies but lack the time, resources, or training to apply them effectively. Some rely on traditional methods such as repetition and translation due to habit, curriculum demands, or perceived student limitations (Masruroh, 2025). As a result, a need to examine not just what strategies are known or recommended, but how they are applied in specific classroom and how students respond to them. This study aims to analyze the teaching strategies used by English teachers in speaking instruction at the eleventh grade of SMK Assa'adah Bungah Gresik. It focuses on identifying the types of strategies applied in the classroom, the frequency and consistency of their use, and the students' responses toward those strategies. By examining both teacher practice and student perception, the research provides a contextual understanding of what works in vocational EFL classrooms and what improvements can be made to support students' speaking development. Ultimately, the study hopes to contribute to more effective, student-centered speaking instruction in Indonesian vocational schools.

METHOD

This study applied a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the teaching strategies used in speaking instruction and to describe students' responses toward those strategies. The research was conducted at SMK Assa'adah Bungah Gresik during the academic year 2024/2025. The participants included one English teacher and the eleventh-grade students of the TPM 1 class. Data were collected through three main instruments: classroom observation, student questionnaires, and documentation. Observations were carried out over three classroom meetings focused on speaking lessons. The researcher used an observation sheet to record the

types of strategies applied by the teacher, along with student engagement and classroom interaction during the teaching process. Student questionnaires were used to gather information about students' experiences and perceptions of the strategies implemented in class. The questionnaire consisted of both multiple-choice and open-ended items, allowing students to express their opinions in depth. Supporting documentation, such as lesson plans and student worksheets, was collected to strengthen and validate the data from observations and questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following procedures outlined by Cresswell (2012), which involved identifying patterns and categories to draw meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research is conducted to identify the teaching strategies used by an English teacher in speaking instruction and to describe how students responded to those strategies in a vocational high school context. Data were gathered from classroom observations during three meetings, student questionnaires, and documentation such as lesson plans and learning materials. These combined sources provided a clear picture of how speaking was taught and received in the eleventh-grade TPM 1 class at SMK Assa'adah Bungah Gresik. During classroom observations, the teacher was found to apply a variety of strategies aimed at developing students' speaking abilities. In the first meeting, the lesson focused on introducing News Item Text. The teacher opened the session with a video presentation, followed by a guided discussion to help students understand the structure and language features of the text. Students were encouraged to respond orally and ask questions, which allowed them to practice spontaneous speaking in a low-pressure environment. To assess comprehension and create a more dynamic classroom experience, the teacher integrated a Quizizz activity. This gamified approach made the learning process more engaging and gave students the opportunity to verbally express answers in a fun, competitive setting.The second classroom meeting centered on group-based learning. Students were divided into small groups and assigned the task of creating their own news stories. This strategy combined elements of discussion, storytelling, and collaborative planning. Each student contributed to writing and preparing a news text, which would later be delivered in spoken form. Students were also asked to keep learning journals where they documented their group process, individual roles, and any language challenges they faced. During this process, the teacher walked around the classroom to monitor progress, offer vocabulary support, correct grammatical errors, and motivate students to use English consistently during group interaction. This meeting demonstrated the application of cooperative learning strategies to build speaking fluency in an authentic, student-centered way.In the third and final meeting, students presented their news items orally. Presentations were delivered in a variety of formats, including live presentations and pre-recorded videos. The use of oral presentations as a strategy helped students practice organizing their ideas and speaking clearly in front of others. The teacher provided rubrics for assessment and also facilitated peer evaluations. This approach allowed students to engage in both speaking and listening, while learning how to give and receive feedback. While some students appeared nervous during presentations, many showed confidence and fluency, indicating that previous speaking activities had helped reduce speaking anxiety. Findings from the student questionnaires revealed a consistent pattern of preference for interactive and group-based activities. Most students reported that communication games, such as vocabulary guessing and group challenges, were both enjoyable and effective. They appreciated the relaxed environment and saw these games as helpful for building vocabulary and speaking fluency. Group discussions were identified as the most frequently used strategy

in class, and many students stated that discussing in small groups allowed them to practice speaking more comfortably. Students felt that they could make mistakes without fear of being judged, and they benefited from peer support during these tasks. Although some strategies like role-play and simulation were not used frequently, students still rated them highly. Many believed that such activities allowed them to use English in realistic situations, such as job interviews or everyday interactions. Storytelling, while less common in classroom practice, was also positively received. Students noted that it helped them structure ideas in logical sequences and improved their vocabulary recall. Oral presentations received mixed feedback. While several students found them helpful for building public speaking skills, others admitted to feeling nervous or unprepared. However, even those who felt anxious recognized the value of practicing in front of the class, especially in terms of pronunciation and confidence. Documentation in the form of lesson plans and worksheets supported the findings from observation and student feedback. The teacher's lesson plans showed that the structured efforts to integrate speaking-focused strategies, by clearing objectives and activities aimed at encouraging oral communication. Learning materials included speaking prompts, vocabulary lists, and guided tasks that required students to interact using English. Student worksheets reflected active participation in group projects, and the structure of assignments indicated that speaking was treated as a skill to be practiced, not just tested. Overall, these results suggest that the teacher employed a range of strategies that combined traditional approaches like drilling with more communicative methods such as group discussion, storytelling, and oral presentation. The most frequently used strategies were those that allowed for structured interaction in pairs or groups, and these were also the most positively received by students. While some effective methods like simulation and role-play were used less often, students expressed a desire to engage in more of these activities in the future. The positive responses from students toward interactive strategies suggest a strong connection between strategy choice and learner engagement. Moreover, the consistent alignment between the teacher's instructional design and the students' preferences highlights the importance of adapting teaching methods to the needs and context of the learners.

Discussion

The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the teaching strategies used in speaking instruction and how students respond to those strategies in the context of a vocational high school. The strategies identified through classroom observation and documentation include group discussions, communication games, drilling, storytelling, and simulations. These were implemented with varying frequency and intensity, depending on the goals of each lesson. Notably, group discussions and communication games were applied more frequently and consistently, while storytelling and simulation were less common but still present. The findings show that students responded more positively to strategies that encouraged participation, collaboration, and low-anxiety speaking environments.

These results confirm previous research that suggest the importance of communicative and student-centered strategies in promoting speaking proficiency. Christie & Listyani (2018) noted that interactive strategies provide more opportunities for learners to use language in real contexts, which helps reduce anxiety and increase fluency. In this study, communication games and group discussions were perceived by students as both enjoyable and effective. These activities allowed learners to express themselves without fear of judgment, particularly in small group settings where peer support was available. This confirms Nunan (2003) argument that successful speaking instruction depends not only on linguistic competence but also on emotional comfort and learner confidence.

The role of collaborative learning in this context appears to be significant. Group discussions and project-based tasks required students to negotiate meaning, share ideas, and support each other in constructing spoken language. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of social interaction in language development, which highlights how learners acquire language through meaningful interaction with others. The cooperative nature of the tasks observed in this study contributed to a classroom environment where speaking was viewed as a shared responsibility rather than an isolated performance, thus lowering affective barriers and encouraging more consistent speaking practice.

While the more frequently used strategies yielded positive results, the underutilized strategies also showed promise. Although storytelling and simulation were not applied in every lesson, students expressed clear interest and appreciation for them. They reported that storytelling helped them organize their ideas and improve fluency, while simulation made the speaking tasks more realistic and relevant. This resonates with Rika Widianita's (2023) study, which found that vocational students were more motivated when speaking activities resembled real-world contexts. In the current study, students' enthusiasm for role-based and story-based activities suggests that integrating these methods more consistently could further enhance speaking development.

The documentation collected, including lesson plans and learning materials, confirmed that the teacher designed lessons with communicative goals in mind. While the teacher employed various strategies, the choice and consistency of each appeared to depend on practical classroom factors such as available time, student readiness, and lesson content. Although these contextual constraints were not directly addressed in the research design, their impact can be inferred from the uneven application of certain strategies. This echoes (Kurniawan et al., 2022) finding that teachers often face challenges in balancing curriculum coverage with interactive teaching approaches, especially in large classes with limited instructional hours.

Another important point emerging from the findings is the value of student feedback in shaping instructional decisions. Students' preferences leaned strongly toward interactive methods, particularly those that gave them more space to speak freely and work collaboratively. Traditional methods such as drilling were seen as less enjoyable, though some students acknowledged their role in reinforcing pronunciation and vocabulary. This suggests that an effective speaking program should combine both accuracy-focused and fluency-focused strategies. Nunan et al., (2003) support this balance, stating that learners need both structured input and open-ended output opportunities to develop communicative competence.

The vocational school context adds further weight to the interpretation of these findings. Unlike general academic schools, vocational students are often more interested in practical language use than in theoretical understanding. Speaking tasks that mimic real workplace communication, such as creating announcements, delivering reports, or practicing dialogues, can serve as both language practice and job skill development. Daar (2019)argue that teaching strategies in vocational settings must be relevant and situational to maintain student engagement and prepare them for actual job-related communication. The findings in this study reflect this view, as students showed greater motivation when tasks were perceived as authentic and meaningful.

Although this study was limited to a single classroom and based on a small sample of student responses, the consistency of the data suggests that the observed strategies had a measurable impact on students' speaking attitudes and participation. The triangulation of observation, questionnaires, and documentation helped validate the results and offered a comprehensive picture of classroom practice. Nevertheless, future studies might explore how these strategies work across different vocational fields or examine the long-term effects of sustained use of simulation and storytelling techniques.

In conclusion, the discussion of findings in this study highlights the central role of communicative and collaborative strategies in effective speaking instruction. While practical limitations may affect their consistent implementation, these methods clearly contribute to increased student engagement, confidence, and fluency. Teachers in vocational schools are encouraged to continue experimenting with varied strategies and to consider student feedback as a valuable tool for instructional planning.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the strategies used by an English teacher in teaching speaking skills to eleventh-grade students at SMK Assa'adah Bungah Gresik, and to investigate the students' responses to these strategies. The results reveal that the teacher employed a variety of strategies to enhance students' speaking skills, including group discussions, storytelling, communication games, oral presentations, and simulations. However, the application of these strategies was not always consistent due to constraints such as time limitations and the conditions of the classroom. The results also show that students responded most positively to interactive, student-centered strategies. Activities like group discussions and communication games were particularly effective in boosting students' confidence, fluency, and motivation. These strategies created a more engaging and participatory environment, allowing students to feel more comfortable practicing their speaking skills. While some strategies, such as role-playing and simulations, were less frequently used due to practical limitations, students expressed a strong preference for them and indicated a desire for more opportunities to engage in these activities. This suggests that students find communicative strategies to be not only more enjoyable but also more effective in helping them improve their speaking abilities. In conclusion, the study confirms that using interactive and student-centered strategies is key to improving speaking instruction in vocational high school classrooms. The positive responses from students, along with their clear preference for certain strategies, underscore the importance of incorporating more communicative activities into the classroom. Despite challenges such as limited time and resources, the teacher's adaptability and willingness to apply these strategies reflect a positive step toward improving speaking instruction. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to continue integrating these strategies more consistently, with greater support to overcome practical barriers and further enhance students' speaking performance.

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