ENHANCING STUDENTŚ SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGHT TASK-BASED LEARNING: AN ACTION RESEARCH AT THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This research was conducted with the objective of enhancing the speaking abilities of students within the Senior High School. Initial interviews were conducted to assess the students' speaking skills, which revealed that their proficiency was hindered by a lack of language knowledge, resulting in a lack of confidence. The students were unfamiliar with various speaking techniques and often resorted to reading text to convey their ideas, lacking effective speaking strategies. To address this, task-based learning was implemented through an action research approach in an eleventh grade, involving twenty five students. Data was collected from pre-tests, post-tests, interviews, and observations. The results indicate that the adoption of task-based learning significantly improved the students' speaking skills in terms of accuracy, vocabulary, and comprehension. The students successfully completed tasks through three phases of learning: pre-task, task-cycle, and form focus, leading to increased confidence and the ability to assess their own progress in pair and group activities.

Keywords: Student's Speaking Skills; Task Based Learning; Speaking

A. Introduction

This action research aims to enhance students' speaking skills through a task-based learning approach at the Senior High School level. Speaking skills constitute a crucial aspect of students' language proficiency but often pose a challenge for many learners. By focusing on a task-based learning approach, this research endeavors to create a learning environment that enables students to develop their speaking skills through concrete and contextual activities. The scope of the research includes the implementation of teaching strategies designed to improve speaking skills, along with monitoring and evaluation of student progress over a specified period. Through the action research approach, this study is

expected to provide profound insights into the effectiveness of task-based learning methods in enhancing students' speaking skills at the Senior High School level, with practical implications that educators can adopt for language learning improvement in high schools.

Task-based language learning, stemming from communicative language teaching, is a subset of this approach and is commonly acknowledged. Teachers have embraced task-based language learning for diverse reasons. Transitioning to task-based syllabi represents an effort to ensure genuine communicative language use in the classroom, as opposed to the pseudo-communication stemming from activities that lack a direct link to real-life situations (Elsheikh Hago Elmahdi, 2016).

Individuals employ language as a means to convey their ideas. Through speaking and writing, people articulate their thoughts and emotions, allowing others to comprehend them through listening or reading. Communication involves the exchange of thoughts, emotions, and knowledge between two individuals. The process of communication incorporates four linguistic skills: speaking, reading, writing, and listening (Firharmawan & Heriyanto, 2023).

Discussing the importance of speaking as one of the language skills is a significant aspect in the field of language teaching. This discussion encompasses various key areas, including instructional techniques, instructional materials, instructional media, language teachers, language learners, and the components of speaking. Each of these elements contributes to the effectiveness of language instruction: Instructional techniques play a crucial role in motivating and engaging learners in the language learning process, instructional materials are essential for contextualizing language usage and meeting the specific needs of language learners, instructional media brings the teaching experience into real-life situations, making learning more practical and relatable, language teachers facilitate and support the learning process, ensuring that learners receive guidance and assistance, language learners themselves manifest their progress by producing meaningful and appropriate utterances, which serve as indicators of instructional

success and the speaking components involve determining which aspects of speaking should be emphasized during speaking class activities (Manurung, 2015).

The stimulating nature of the learning process negatively impacts students' speaking performance. In the initial data gathering interview for this study, students revealed that they routinely engage in unchallenging group presentations prepared at home, relying on reading texts to convey ideas during class discussions. Notably, they lack effective speaking strategies and are unfamiliar with diverse activities that encourage spontaneous speech. The fear of ridicule from peers adds to their reluctance to speak, leading to a sense of shame. The pre-test results highlight the students' low proficiency in speaking, with accuracy being the weakest aspect, followed by vocabulary and comprehension. Recognizing the need for improvement, the researcher opts to implement task-based learning to assist students in enhancing their speaking skills (Safitri et al., 2020).

Based on my role as a teacher at MA Al Mazaya Paser School, specifically with eleventh grade students, particularly in class 11A, it is evident that their proficiency in speaking is still at a low level. Observable indicators include infrequent oral responses to teacher questions, challenges in selecting suitable words for constructing sentences or expressing themselves, and struggles in recognizing words and applying grammar rules.

In the teaching of speaking skills at MA Al Mazaya Paser, as outlined by the Curriculum 2013, students are expected to engage in various transactional activities, such as making offers, accepting or refusing offers, expressing opinions, agreeing or disagreeing, and seeking, providing, or denying information. Despite these established goals, the reality in the classroom reveals a significant disparity. During my first semester of teaching, it became evident through observation that students struggled to articulate their ideas fluently. The eighth-grade students at MA Al Mazaya Paser fell short of the curriculum's standards in speaking performance. The researcher identified a lack of proficiency in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar as the primary issue. This deficiency hindered their ability to actively participate in speaking class activities. Several indicators

pointed to their inadequate fluency: infrequent oral responses to teacher questions, difficulty in selecting appropriate words to form sentences, lack of creativity in grammatical constructions, and a reluctance to speak English in daily life due to fear of ridicule or making mistakes.

Additional indicators within the classroom environment contribute to the challenges in speaking proficiency. Throughout the teaching and learning process, students exhibit a lack of enthusiasm and interest in participating in activities, showing a disinterest in the lessons. The classroom becomes excessively noisy when all students speak simultaneously. Another contributing factor to the low speaking proficiency is the reliance on student worksheets containing various tasks. During speaking lessons, the teacher instructs students to perform exercises from the worksheet, including reading dialogues aloud to the class. However, this method proves ineffective in enhancing their speaking skills. To address this issue, the researcher aims to improve speaking proficiency through action research, employing the direct method in the learning process. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) cited by (Damairi & Suyadi, 2022), the direct method involves teaching a foreign language without translation, relying on demonstration and action to convey meaning. Mastering speaking skills is particularly challenging for eleventh grade students at MA Al Mazaya Paser, as observed in their difficulty and lack of creativity in forming sentences. Their hesitancy to speak English in daily life stems from fear of ridicule, mistakes, and limited vocabulary. The direct method, which emphasizes associating meaning, spelling, and the target language directly, is proposed as a solution. In this approach, the teacher introduces new target language words or phrases by demonstrating their meanings.

Speaking Skills

Speaking is recognized as one of the most vital skills among the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is often considered a key indicator of language proficiency. Speaking is the most important skill to master when learning a language as a foreign or second language, since students are often judged by their speaking ability in real-life situations (Rao, 2019) in (Mashwani & Damio, 2022).

Harmer (2001: 269) in (Mangkar et al., 2021) emphasizes that speaking ability involves not only understanding language features but also the capability to process information and communicate spontaneously. This includes effectively managing conversation turns and using nonverbal cues. The goal of speaking is to enable students to express their understanding of a topic through descriptive monologues. In some cases, speaking serves to give instructions or achieve specific outcomes, such as describing a person or place. However, teaching speaking is often considered more difficult than teaching the other four language skills. This requires students to put in more effort, while teachers must use a variety of engaging activities to capture their interest. Listening alone is insufficient; students need opportunities to practice speaking actively.

Role play is a key activity in the communicative approach, as it gives students many opportunities to communicate in different social contexts. This helps improve their fluency in the target language, encourages interaction with peers, increases motivation, and makes the learning process more fun. Furthermore, role play is a flexible activity that allows for a wide range of variations and creativity (Putri & Mahripah, 2018). Role-play is a teaching strategy where students are given designated roles and must speak and act according to those roles. Arham et al. (2016) in (Pinatih, 2021) highlighted that the use of role-play enhances students' speaking skills and boosts their self-confidence.

According to Taylor (2000, p. 1) in (Diniarty & Bunau, 2018) describes drama as a group-based art form where individuals work together to transform, perform, and reflect on the human experience. In drama, people act as the instruments of exploration. According to Whiteson, V. (1996) in (Setyorini & Subroto STKIP Kusuma Negara, 2019) notes that drama enhances imagination and storytelling, which in turn adds more detail to creative writing. Drama reflects life and is distinct from other literary forms because of its unique traits. While it can be read, drama is primarily written to be performed, with the primary goal being its presentation on stage before an audience.

As stated by Makmun (2007) in (Merizawati STAI Al-Akbar Surabaya et al., 2023), storytelling is an art that requires practice. It offers several benefits for children, including supporting their emotional, cognitive, and language development, as well as fostering growth in social skills, aesthetics, spirituality, and encouraging exploration and discovery. (Raya et al., 2024) storytelling is the act of narrating stories to others. It is a relaxing and entertaining activity that can be enjoyable for everyone, helping to foster a positive attitude in learners toward both learning and using the language.

Implementing Task Based Learning

According to (D. Willis & Willis, 2007) in (Mangkar et al., 2021) Task-based learning emphasizes a practical language experience where students utilize their knowledge by performing tasks. The implementation process is divided into three stages: pre-task, task execution, and language focus.

The pre-task phase is designed to prepare students with the language they need for the task. During this phase, the teacher engages in activities such as introducing the topic, explaining the task, and facilitating vocabulary brainstorming sessions based on previously learned material. This helps activate the students' linguistic knowledge in preparation for the task cycle. Students are encouraged to use only English from the beginning, fostering a habit that supports the development of their speaking skills.

The second phase is the task cycle, where students take a more active role in the main task through pair and group activities. This phase offers students the chance to complete the task in various ways, drawing on their existing language skills. They may prepare and share a report on their findings with the class. Other activities might include practicing dialogues, role-playing, turn-taking, information gap exercises in pairs, or group storytelling and drama. These activities help students exchange information and practice interactive strategies like role-play and simulation. During turn-taking, students may negotiate meaning. The teacher provides support and feedback as needed.

Following the task cycle, the language focus phase takes place. During this phase, the teacher draws attention to the accurate use of English, providing feedback on language form and word meanings in context. Students are encouraged to repeat speaking activities or perform a speaking task as an output. They may also reflect on their learning by commenting on their task results, repeating activities, and identifying grammar mistakes that occurred during the repetition. This phase ensures that students engage in meaningful learning.

B. Methodology

The research design in this study primarily combined classroom action research and research and development. This can be seen from the instruments used, which included observations, planning, action, and reflection, with some parts of the research carried out in three cycles.

This study involved twenty five students to eleventh grade from the Senior High School AL Mazaya Paser. Initial data from interviews and observations revealed that the students faced difficulties in speaking due to limited language knowledge and a lack of confidence. They also had limited exposure to various speaking activities. To address these issues, the researcher assigned one topic for five groups where students completed tasks using different speaking activities through task-based procedures.

In phase 1, the students were introduced to the topics and refreshed on the language expressions and vocabulary required to complete the tasks. They listened to a short dialogue, and the researcher, who served as the teacher, facilitated a brainstorming session.

In phase 2, the students worked in pairs and groups, starting with various activities such as practicing simple dialogues, turn-taking, information gap exercises, interviews, discussions, and short role-plays during the first eight meetings, which were part of cycles one. In the last four meetings, or cycle two, the students participated in storytelling, simulations, and drama activities.

In phase 3, the students presented their activities and were provided with feedback on their language form. They reviewed their learning and repeated certain speaking activities, ensuring the correct use of grammar and vocabulary.

The data include both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The quantitative data were derived from the pre-test and post-test results, which measured three speaking components: grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. The qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview to gather students' feedback on the implementation of task-based learning at the conclusion of the study.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Result

This study involved twenty five students who took part in assessments ranging from a pre-test to a post-test. Additionally, their speaking skills focusing on accuracy, vocabulary, and comprehension were evaluated at the end of cycles one, two, and three. The pre-test results indicate that students' speaking skills are relatively low, with *KKM* are 75. Among these, accuracy is the weakest compared to the other indicators.

In cycle 1, the scores for the speaking skill indicators show a slight increase compared to the pre-test results. The vocabulary score is 60, while comprehension is 55.05. On the other hand, accuracy continues to have the lowest score at 50.08.

The results reveal that students' speaking scores have increased in cycle 2. Vocabulary and comprehension, the key indicators of speaking, are now still under a level *KKM* 75, with vocabulary achieving the highest scores of 74.08. Although accuracy score 70.02 and comprehension are 73.05 has improved by compared to cycle 1, it remains the lowest-scoring indicator and is still in the poor for *KKM* 75. Vocabulary and accuracy has seen improvement points and comprehension has increased compare to the scores in cycle 1.

The results scores increased in cycle 3 for speaking indicators increased from *KKM* score 75, signifying a good level of speaking proficiency. Comprehension has the highest score at 80.05, while vocabulary follows with 78.90, and accuracy is at 77.50.

Students Response

Students generally agree that task-based learning activities are beneficial for developing their speaking skills and increasing their confidence. They find that they can now express their ideas without depending on reading from texts. The students also realize the importance of practicing these activities more often outside of the classroom. Furthermore, they appreciate that task-based learning allows them to monitor and assess their own learning. Below are some remarks from students who participated in this research.

Group [A] "I used to feel very nervous speaking in front of the class because my English wasn't strong. I would often prepare and memorize a short speech or a few sentences to present in the next session. Now, I really enjoy the speaking activities we do in class. Although I was shy at first, I eventually got used to them. My favorite activities are drama and simulation. I find it helpful to learn speaking step by step through task-based methods. I also realize I need to practice more outside of class to improve further."

Group [B] "I used to avoid speaking in class because I wasn't confident about my grammar. However, after engaging in group tasks and activities through task-based learning, I've come to understand that grammar isn't about memorization it's about applying it in conversations. I realize that speaking well requires a step-by-step approach, and task-based learning has provided me with the right method to improve."

Group [C] "I was often frustrated with my vocabulary and grammar skills. At first, using grammar correctly while speaking made me anxious, but collaborating in groups helped me feel more comfortable. I enjoy the speaking activities that follow the task-based learning approach. However, I realize I still need to practice more to improve further."

Group [D] "I used to feel nervous about making are mistakes when speaking English. I would always rely on my notes before saying anything. Sometimes, I made grammar or vocabulary errors and didn't know how to fix them. But after practicing in pairs and groups to finish tasks, I've gained more confidence in speaking. I really enjoy activities like passing the ball for turn-

taking and short role-plays in class they make me happy. Task-based learning is helpful, but I know I need to practice more to get better."

Group [E] "I used to feel stressed when my friends asked me questions because I couldn't answer them on the spot. I wasn't sure if my answers were correct. But after working on task-based learning activities in pairs and groups, I've gained more confidence in responding, as my friends help me with grammar and vocabulary. I really enjoy gap-filling tasks because they only require brief answers, which makes them easier for me."

2. Discussions

The development of students' speaking abilities is visible in every cycle of the action research. Their self-assurance grows as they progress through structured speaking activities, starting with simple dialogues and advancing to a mini drama by the classes' conclusion.

The test outcomes from the three cycles reveal that the students significantly enhanced their speaking skills. The modest improvement in the mean score in cycle 1 reflects the students' initial progress in speaking more accurately. They were guided to develop awareness and familiarity with applying appropriate grammar and vocabulary while speaking. Furthermore, they were urged to complete language exercises and engage in various speaking tasks to strengthen their proficiency.

Initially, the students seemed hesitant and unsure, but they eventually found the turn-taking activities in pairs enjoyable. They practiced asking short questions and giving concise answers without reading from notes. Later, they moved on to short role-plays in pairs and groups. By the time they reached cycles 1 and 2, the students appeared much more confident in portraying different roles and exploring diverse topics.

In second cycle, the students took part in information gap activities, focusing on meaning negotiation and developing their speaking skills with the help of pictures and maps. Their performance improved compared to cycle 1, as seen in their higher scores. However, accuracy remained a challenge, with the

lowest mean score among the indicators, showing that students struggled with using appropriate grammar. To tackle this issue, the researcher decided to design speaking activities that would specifically encourage students to critically evaluate and improve their grammar.

In the third cycle, the studnts participated in storytelling, simulation, and mini-drama activities. They worked together in groups to develop stories, decide on themes, and write scripts for their mini-dramas, with the researcher stepping in to assist when necessary. The groups provided feedback to one another on grammar usage, which helped them focus on using appropriate grammar and vocabulary. The students appeared to eenjoy the activities and even improvised during their mini-drama performances, showcasing their confidence in real-life English communication. The combination of enjoyable learning and the responsibility of creating storytelling and mini-drama performances motivated the students to enhance their speaking skills. Their scores in the third cycle revealed significant improvement, highlighting how task-based learning effectively improved their speaking abilities and confidence.

D. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research aims to enhance students' speaking skills using task-based learning. The progression from pre-test to post-test results shows development in students' performance. A modest improvement was seen in the score from the pre-test to cycle 1. In cycle 2, students' speaking scores improved, but still categorized as poor from *KKM* 75. By cycle 3, significant improvement was evident across all indicators compared to cycle 2, underscoring the positive impact of task-based learning on students' speaking skills.

The rise in students' scores reflects an improvement in their speaking abilities. This is reinforced by the students' responses to task-based learning, as they found that working on tasks in pairs and groups helped them speak English better. They practiced a range of activities, such as simple dialogues, turn-taking, information gaps, interviews, discussions, short role-plays, simulations, and mini-dramas. A key benefit was their ability to evaluate their own learning. These

varied experiences encouraged the students to further enhance their speaking skills moving forward.

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