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OPTIMIZING SPEAKING SKILLS: UNVEILING CHALLENGES AND DESIGNING SOLUTIONS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to uncover challenges and design solutions in optimizing the speaking skills of elementary school students. This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study type, examining the experiences of two elementary school teachers in Bandung City in developing students' speaking skills. Data collection in this research utilizes interview and observation techniques. The results indicate that students still face difficulties in speaking, especially in formal situations such as expressing opinions, storytelling, and even when answering questions from teachers. Students appear rigid, shy, and fearful during speaking activities, lacking the confidence and courage to speak in class. Both language and non-language factors can be developed by teachers to enhance students' speaking skills. Through this research, teachers unanimously agree that teaching speaking skills is crucial in preparing students for life in society.

Keywords: *Elementary School, Phenomenological Study, Speaking Skill*

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a communication tool used to convey ideas, messages, and information from one's mind to others, whether orally or in writing. According to Hurlock (2007), language plays a crucial role in a child's development. It is the center of every child's life, used for communication with others. Mahendra (2019) asserts that communication is an unavoidable skill that humans, as social beings, must possess, emphasizing the necessity of interpersonal communication. Communicative interaction can take various forms, including verbal and non-verbal methods such as writing, body language, and more.

Speaking skills constitute one of the four language skills that must be continuously taught to maximize students' communication skills (Rahman et al., 2019). Speaking is a fundamental skill crucial for the development of other language skills like listening, reading, and writing. Dewi et al. (2019) highlight the importance of speaking skills as a crucial oral skill for interpersonal communication. Effectively speaking is vital in all forms of human relationships. Among the four language skills, speaking is equally significant but not easily acquired; it requires regular practice and appropriate learning methods.

The 2013 curriculum is designed to help students communicate competently, with speaking lessons aiming to acquire effective speaking skills. Speaking lessons at the elementary level involve training in social interaction, expressing ideas during learning, and developing thinking skills in students. Magdalena et al. (2021) emphasize that mastering speaking skills facilitates students in communicating their ideas at school and maintaining positive relationships with others.

Tumbunan (2018) emphasizes the importance of teaching speaking skills to students, urging against neglecting this aspect. Learning to speak enables students to articulate their thoughts, opinions, and feelings, aligning with the language learning goal of enabling students to communicate accurately in various situations, expressing their thoughts and experiences in Bahasa Indonesia, and fostering communication, socialization, and interaction with other community members.

As a formal educational institution, schools must pay attention to the aspects of developing students' potential, creativity, and confidence, especially

in speaking. Speaking skills require various supportive elements, and achieving proficiency in this skill demands dedication, strong will, learning, and continuous practice. The ability to speak fluently stems not only from one's knowledge of language characteristics but also from their capacity to process information. A conducive speaking climate and culture can encourage individuals to be more creative, active, and intelligent in their verbal expressions. This means that many aspects need to be mastered to prepare for effective conversations, ranging from simple tasks like choosing words and constructing sentences to articulating thoughts orally for everyone to understand (Berninger & Abbott, 2010).

Language skills, particularly speaking, involve several elements that need to be developed, including mental and physical preparation for speaking, positive role models to emulate, opportunities to practice speaking, as well as motivation and instructions for honing speaking skills (Hurlock, 2007). In this context, teachers, as central figures, need to design speaking instruction programs based on appropriate approaches. Teaching and learning activities should guide students to actively experience speaking correctly and appropriately. This is crucial because at the elementary school level, students receive the foundational aspects of speaking that encourage them to practice speaking. Through speaking lessons in school, students can develop the ability to speak confidently both in and outside the classroom. It is essential for students not only to develop their speaking skills in the school environment but also in their daily lives, such as in their families or communities (Stanley & Dillingham, 2013).

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach because it provides an elaboration and explanation of the phenomenon under investigation (Cresswell, 2016). In this study, a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach was chosen to investigate the subjective experiences of individuals related to the phenomenon of speaking skills in elementary schools in the city of Bandung. Through field research and an approach to information sources, the researcher aims to describe and depict the phenomenon of students' speaking skills experienced by teachers in one of the elementary schools in Bandung. Data collection in this research utilizes semi-structured interview techniques and observation, examining the experiences of two elementary school teachers in developing students' speaking skills. From the generated data, several factors that constitute the main problems influencing the speaking skills of elementary school students in Bandung can be identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Speaking skills are one of the abilities that can enhance communication both inside and outside the classroom as children grow. Speaking skills are crucial for giving and receiving information, thereby improving the quality of life in modern civilization (Firmansyah, 2018). Speaking activities, as a vital part of language skills, play a significant role in both classroom settings and daily life (Darmuki & Hariyadi, 2019). Therefore, mastery of speaking skills is essential for everyone.

Based on the existing reality, there is a gap between expectations and the actual situation in the field, as indicated by interviews conducted on October 4th and 5th with fifth-grade teachers at one of the public elementary schools in Bandung. The information gathered from the interviews reveals that students' speaking skills are still relatively low. This is evidenced by several interview responses, including (1) students experiencing difficulty speaking in formal situations, such as expressing opinions, storytelling, and even answering questions from teachers, (2) students appearing rigid, shy, and fearful during speaking activities in the classroom, and (3) a common challenge faced by teachers is that students lack confidence and courage to speak in class. Consistent with the views of Boyce et al. (2007), individuals may naturally speak, but in formal situations, nervousness often arises, leading to disorganized thoughts and incoherent language. Students with low speaking skills may struggle to communicate effectively with teachers and fellow students, making it challenging for them to express their ideas and opinions.

The interview results are supported by the preliminary observations conducted by the researcher from October 10th to October 14th. Based on these observations, the lack of students' speaking abilities can be attributed to several factors, including: (1) teachers not maximally utilizing suitable and engaging teaching models, as they tend to employ conventional teaching methods, resulting in infrequent discussions between teachers and students or among students themselves, (2) during lessons, teachers predominantly focus on delivering material by explaining it directly and then assigning individual tasks, (3) when students are given the opportunity to ask questions, only a few are willing to do so, with many choosing to remain silent, and (4) when teachers pose questions, some students appear shy, fearful, and hesitant in responding, and some even refuse to answer the questions at all.

The issues identified by the researcher align with findings from previous studies. Muna et al.'s (2019) research indicates that students still exhibit hesitation, fear, and embarrassment when given the chance to speak in front of the class. Many students are reluctant to come forward or express their questions and opinions about the stories in the student book using their own

language. Additionally, Perdana and Budiningsih (2020) state in their research that the speaking aspect is still low, with many students facing difficulties and lacking practice in expressing ideas and feelings. This is evident during presentations, where students appear worried and uncomfortable due to difficulties speaking in front of the class. Most students are hesitant to express their ideas and lack initiative in sharing their opinions.

Furthermore, many students also speak hesitantly, causing the content of their conversation to be unclear. When the teacher poses questions to the entire class, students often take a long time to respond. Some students are reluctant to answer the teacher's questions due to fear of giving the wrong answer. Moreover, many students have not demonstrated the courage to speak in front of the class. Delvia et al. (2019) in their research, grounded in the reality of elementary schools, found that the speaking skills of participants are low. Students are hesitant to express their opinions, feel embarrassed speaking in front of the class, get nervous when speaking, and stutter when delivering sentences.

In training students' speaking skills, it is advisable to start with easier factors, such as building courage. Begin by cultivating the courage of the students. Considering that speaking exercises are individual and the number of students in a class is quite large, when one person or a group of students speaks, others can be assigned as observers. Each student is tasked with filling out an assessment table with comments on the observed factors. Prior to this, the teacher should explain the meaning of each language and non-language factor in training speaking skills. Students are not assessing but providing comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their peers' speaking abilities based on the observed factors.

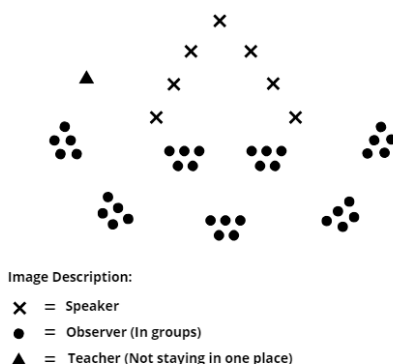


Figure 1. The First Method In Arranging Positions of Students, Observers, and Teachers During Speaking Exercises

In the first speaking session, for instance, the teacher establishes four trained factors: pronunciation of vowels and consonants in the language factor, and courage/spirit and fluency in the non-language factor. All students who are not speaking provide comments or suggestions to their peers regarding strengths and weaknesses when speaking in front of the class.

When students speak individually, the other students take on the role of observers. Students are divided into groups, each consisting of the same number of students engaged in the discussion. Each group observes a speaker, allowing each speaker to receive feedback from multiple people. Students who are not speaking are assigned the task of observing based on assessment guidelines, both individually and in groups. After the speaking activity, the observers express their comments. In this context, the teacher pays attention to student comments and actively corrects any inaccuracies. The teacher also provides comments. Following that, the speaking activity is repeated to observe changes in the speaker's performance after receiving feedback.

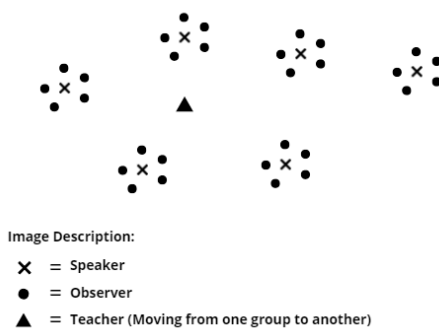


Figure 2. The Second Method In Arranging Positions of Students, Observers, and Teachers During Speaking Exercises

The implementation of this technique can offer reciprocal benefits for both students and teachers. Students receive feedback, increasing the likelihood of improvement in their abilities. Students serving as observers deepen their understanding of factors contributing to effective speaking, enhancing their own speaking skills. Additionally, these observer students have the opportunity to speak when expressing their comments. Teachers also receive valuable feedback on the progress of their students' speaking skills. Thus, the teacher succeeds in transforming speaking activities into lively class activities, observed and enjoyed by every class member.

CONCLUSION

Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that (1) students still experience difficulties in speaking, particularly in formal situations such as expressing opinions, storytelling, and even when answering questions from the teacher, (2) students still appear stiff, shy, and fearful during speaking activities in the classroom, and (3) students lack confidence and courage to speak in class. The insufficient speaking abilities of students are attributed to several factors, including the suboptimal use of appropriate and enjoyable learning models in the teaching process. The teaching approach mainly revolves around delivering material by directly explaining the entire lesson, followed by individual assignments, resulting in students' speaking skills remaining underdeveloped. Teachers unanimously agree that teaching speaking skills is crucial in preparing students for life in society.

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