

DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH CONVERSATION ACTIVITIES: A STUDY AT SMPN 44 BATAM

Dwi Hardi Yanti¹, Aulia Putri²

^{1,2}(English Education Study Program, Universitas Riau Kepulauan, Indonesia)
aulia@fkip.unrika.ac.id

Abstract

This study examined the use of conversation activities and how they improved the speaking skills of the eighth graders of SMPN 44 Batam in the academic year of 2024/2025. The research sought to find out how students fluently expressed themselves in vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall confidence with regards to speech through guided speaking activities. A qualitative approach was applied using triangulation in data collection which included classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and students, and document analysis. The raw data were processed in a cyclical manner through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing during fieldwork. The findings showed that conversation activities greatly enhanced students' engagement with the speaking tasks, their confidence to express ideas, and general performance in speaking. It was shown that interaction among students and working in collaborative groups alleviated anxiety and promoted more genuine communication. The support of teacher's prompt and accurate feedback was also important for the students' improvement. The conversation approach used in the study provides a good and interesting environment for teaching English. Sufficient practice to develop students' spoken English and communicative skills is provided to be used in real situations.

Keywords : *communicative language teaching, conversation, enhance, speaking skill*

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely spoken international languages across the world. Many individuals aspire to learn English in order to communicate effectively and foster positive relationships and communities on a global scale. According to Harmer (as cited in Daar, 2020), learners' motivations influence what they need and want to learn, and these motivations ultimately affect the lessons that are delivered.

At SMPN 44 Batam, students are accustomed to engaging in English conversations both inside and outside the classroom. Florez (as cited in Aneski, 2022) emphasizes that students can improve their speaking skills by consistently practicing English in daily interactions. Junior high school students, including those at SMPN 44 Batam, often encounter challenges related to vocabulary limitations, pronunciation difficulties, and fear of making mistakes—yet these issues can be addressed through regular exposure to speaking activities.

One of the core learning practices implemented at SMPN 44 Batam is the integration of conversation activities in English classes. Junior high school students are naturally curious, full of life, and eager to express themselves verbally. Speaking tasks would normally be spread throughout an English lesson, usually after the introduction of new vocabulary, grammar structures, or reading materials. These three areas provide the background for building sentences and conversing in class. Therefore, students achieve fluency and gain confidence using English as a tool for everyday communication.

On top of that, English Day is conducted at SMPN 44 Batam each Thursday morning before classes. The program gives school children ample opportunity to practice spoken English, especially with organized conversations. The goal of the program is to increase exposure to speaking situations and give a wider range of meaningful contexts for practicing the language.

According to the observation data, English-speaking skills of SMPN 44 Batam graduates are generally good; discussion activities have been frequent in the classrooms and have increased learning ability toward the greater target goal of English teaching: to be able to communicate in social and academic contexts. This research was to find out how conversation activities were integrated into speaking instruction activities in the eighth-grade students at SMPN 44 Batam in the academic year 2024-2025. It was also intended to analyze the responses of students towards the conversation activities as well as their experiences of speaking practices within their learning environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study is intended to explore ways in which activities in conversation develop speaking and vocabulary fluency and confidence in eighth-graders at SMPN 44 Batam in the school year 2024-2025. The study has the primary research question: How conversation activities impact the speaking abilities of eighth-grade students? The sub-questions of the study include the following: 1) What are the challenges experienced by students in joining conversation activities? 2) How do students and teachers perceive these activities in terms of

effectiveness in improving speaking skills? 3) What are the strategies that students use to cope with language barriers while speaking?

In this regard, a qualitative design would be appropriate to describe the implementation process, the responses of the students involved, and the rest of the community and the data available. Much importance would be given to understanding the context to shed light on any actions or behavior by the students under study. This is according to Hennink et al. (2020, page 10), who state that qualitative research is a method for using a particular collection of exercise research to analyze the people experiences more closely. Furthermore, as per Pillai and Kaushal (2020, p.3), "descriptive research does not control the factors in study but mostly focuses on the current affairs description as it is occurring at the present time".

The implementation of conversation activities to improve the speaking abilities of eighth graders at SMPN 44 Batam during the 2024–2025 academic year was described in this study using a case study methodology. Analyzing the students' reactions to these exercises was another goal. As a result, this research used a case study. A case study is an in-depth investigation of an individual, a group of individuals, or a unit with the goal of generalizing over multiple units, according to Heale and Twycross (2018, p.7).

This research was conducted among the eighth-grade students at SMPN 44 Batam, involving a total of 288 students. The sample was drawn to represent different classes in order to ensure diverse perspectives. Triangulation, or the use of several data sources, was employed as a data collection approach in this study. Through documentation, interviews, and observation, data were collected systematically. All of the data gathered during the fieldwork was integrated during the analysis process. The primary instrument was the researcher herself, who actively engaged in fieldwork.

A number of field tools were used to carry out the investigation. First, during observations, notes regarding the execution of the conversation activities were recorded using a notebook and pen. Second, a list of interview questions was produced by the researcher. Ten questions were created for the English teacher to

investigate the conversation activities' process. Ten questions were provided for the students, two of which focused on the advantages or results of taking part in the activities, and the other eight of which explored the process. Finally, during the informants' interviews, audio recordings and pictures were taken using a camera or video recorder. Three data analysis approaches were used in the study: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Even before all of the data was actually gathered, this process continued throughout the field research.

FINDINGS

Based on data gathered through various research tools, including documentation, interviews, and observations, it can be concluded that the implementation of conversation activities at SMPN 44 Batam has contributed to improving students' speaking abilities. The findings are summarized as follows:

1. Findings from Observation

The observations indicated that students engaged in various speaking activities in the English lesson, such as role plays, group and pair discussions, and other structured speaking activities. While some students required the teacher's encouragement to engage fully in these activities, the majority displayed enthusiasm and a willingness to participate. Activities where students had the opportunity to air their opinions were especially favored by the students, especially if they were engaging in discussion relating to familiar or relatable topics. In one instance, an observer noted, "Several students became more vocal when discussing topics related to their hobbies or family, showing spontaneous reactions and laughter during pair discussions."

Students exhibited varying levels of vocabulary usage and fluency. Some students were confident and had a good command of vocabulary, while others resorted to simpler expressions and even sometimes mixed in Indonesian words when they struggled with but were still able to find the English word for. Fluency varied as well; some students spoke effortlessly and fluently, while others tended to hesitate a lot and had frequent pauses while constructing their sentences. As such, Hinkel (2006) suggests that fluency is one of the indicators of a learner's communicative ability or competence; moreover, fluency is often associated with

feelings of confidence or lexical access. Despite these differences, the majority of the students demonstrated favorable attitudes towards all speaking activities and showed improvement in confidence, pronunciation, and overall participation during the observed sessions. Table 1 provides a detailed representation of the findings.

Table 1: The Data from Observation

Category	Indicators	8.1 (28 stud.)	8.2 (29 stud.)	8.3 (29 stud.)	8.4 (30 stud.)	8.5 (28 stud.)
Student Participation	Actively engages in conversation	18	20	21	24	17
	Takes turns appropriately	22	23	25	27	21
	Collaborates with peers	19	21	22	25	18
Use of English Vocabulary	Uses a range of vocabulary	15	18	19	23	14
	Contextual appropriateness	17	19	20	24	16
	Attempts new words	14	16	17	21	13
Fluency	Speaks with minimal hesitation	13	15	18	22	12
	Maintains coherence	16	18	19	24	15
	Self-corrects appropriately	14	17	18	22	13
Pronunciation & Clarity	Pronounces words clearly	16	18	20	24	15
	Uses proper intonation	15	17	19	23	14
Overall Engagement	Displays confidence	17	19	20	25	16
	Demonstrates interest	18	20	21	26	17

2. Findings from Teacher Interview

The English teacher examined conversation activities, their planning and challenges. The conversation activities were structured prompts, real-life

situations, and engaging topics for discussion to facilitate inclusive, interactive conversation learning. Pre-teaching the vocabulary, supplying sentence starters, and conducting a discussion in pairs or groups were all techniques to ensure equal participation for the teacher.

Whereas fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation formed the main assessment areas, instead of formal testing, feedback and observation were the basis for assessing progress. "I try not to put pressure on students through tests. I observe how they respond and interact. If they hesitate, I guide them gently," noted the teacher. Group and pair activities were said to relieve tension and promote freer communication among students. Confidence gradually improved among students through constructive feedback and motivation, but challenges remained, especially in complex-thinking-spoken-idea disabilities and an aversion to mistakes. These observations are consistent with those of Nation and Newton (2009), who postulated that anxiety and the fear of error are common barriers in second-language speaking development. However, the teacher was convinced that continual exposure to speaking activities best developed the students' speaking skills.

3. Findings from Student Interviews

Those class 8.4 students who reported on the interviews were, on the whole, positive about the talk activities. This type of exercises was particularly fun especially when talked about something known like daily life, hobbies or personal experience. "I like talking about my pets or my weekend because I already know the words, and I don't feel afraid to speak." Nevertheless, some students acknowledged feeling anxious, especially when making comments in class, out of fear of making errors in front of classmates.

The students faced vocabulary challenges and also used strategies such as inferring from the context, recalling lessons from previous classes, and asking friends or the teacher for help. One learner stated, "When I forget a word, I ask my friend or just try another way to say it." They sometimes felt that the teacher was very important in giving directions, support, and correction. Some students liked whole class discussions because of the different opinions; however, most

students preferred to work in pairs or small group because it was more relaxing and less intimidating. These outcomes are consistent with Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis, which argues that language develops through language production under communicative conditions. They also all agree that their vocabulary, fluency and independence have benefited from these activities, despite some teething issues.

4. Findings from Documentation

The field observations and interviews were supplemented by field notes and video recordings. These field notes documented specific examples of students developing confidence over time, pausing to reflect on their utterances because of language constraints, and errors in pronunciation. For example, one field note stated, "Student hesitated recounting a holiday experience prompting teacher to rephrase their question and the student provided a more coherent response with a smile." The video recordings also supported the observations and interviews regarding the participation of students; thus some did very well in small groups or pairs, while more needed support as part of the whole group. The video recordings documented the teachers intervening, such as rephrasing questions in a manner that would allow students to clarify what they were trying to convey or sometimes asking students to elaborate.

The combined data from the observations, interviews, field notes, and video recordings indicate that the conversational activities presented many opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills. Even though students demonstrated a wide range of fluency, vocabulary, and confidence, the classroom environment continued to engage students and promote a sustained effort for improvement. Furthermore, the teacher was intentional in planning invigorating conversational activities and providing affirming feedback and support for students which contributed to seeing students develop their speaking abilities. Students understood the value of developing their self-esteem and improving their English communication skills through the activities.

With the consistent practice and exposure to engaging conversation exercises, the students were able to improve their pronunciation, build their vocabularies,

and speak with greater fluency. While they still faced obstacles including hesitation, gaps in vocabulary, and anxiety related to larger group discussions, the findings indicated that the conversation activities fostered a positive and conducive learning environment for student learners to build their English speaking in a beneficial and enjoyable manner.

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, a discussion of the outcomes from the documentations, student and instructor interviews, and classroom observations are presented. The discussion links the outcomes to theories and research by illustrating how the conversation activities were enacted, and what student responses to practices were during English-speaking practice.

1. Acting out and enacting conversation exercises in speaking lessons

Materials and process for the conversation activities in speaking lessons were successfully employed in the eighth-grade classrooms at SMPN 44 Batam. Over the course of one week, the five eighth-grade classes I observed (8.1 to 8.5) were exposed to conversation activities that had a structure and assisted in meaningful oral interactions. There were students who were initially shy and withdrawn; however, after some engagement, they began to actively participate. At times, field notes expressed that "students looked more confident in the third session, especially for the pair work of familiar topics." The results are consistent with Suparman (2017, p.41), who states that teachers are responsible for leading the students' oral production to create a means of language development that can function as an English speaking tool.

2. Student Participation and Engagement

Student engagement was inconsistent between the classes and between students and based on their self-confidence, peer contexts, and knowledge of the topic. Students interviewed from class 8.4 expressed that they felt nervous at the beginning of the task because they were worried about committing a mistake. One responded, "I'm afraid if I say something wrong, my friends will laugh,," but continued the task because they had practiced the activity so much they began to feel comfortable speaking. The findings found in this project resonates with Wang

(2023, p.348), who states that student-centered learning improves engagement through ownership, active participation, and feedback that encourages student voice.

The peer aspect of the pair work facilitated participation. Students indicated they felt more at ease in a smaller number of groups. One student commented, "I like to talk in pairs because I don't feel so nervous," which reflects Tavares (2016, p.14), who states that ESL learners acquire the new language more efficiently in peer conversations and often use contextual expressions of their peers.

3. Vocabulary Usage and Fluency Development

Different students also vary in terms of vocabulary use and fluency, with some students confident and versatile with their vocabulary use, particularly on familiar contexts. Others struggle to share their ideas, relying on simpler expressions. I noted, "This student was constantly saying 'uh' and pausing to remember the next word he wanted." This agrees with Khaliliaqdam's (2014, p.1) perspective where teachers can provide students support through narrative and sentence building tasks.

Self-repairs made up a fair number of occurrences. In some sessions, students immediately self-corrected or would repeat a phrase or used an expression such as "uh" or "I mean..." in order to compensate for communicative failure. For example, one student said, "I... I like to play... uh... badminton," before restarting with a clearer expression. This confirms Wong and Waring's theory (as cited in Beshir and Yigzaw, 2022,p.4) with contextualizing self-repair strategies helps students address their linguistic trouble and help facilitate language acquisition.

4. Pronunciation and Confidence in Speaking

Pronunciation and intonation progressively improved. In 8.1 and 8.5, students generally demonstrated better initial pronunciation; while the students in 8.2 and 8.4 needed more corrections. In the teacher's interview: "Students often say, 'is my pronunciation correct, Miss?'. This indicates they are conscious and want to improve." Constructive feedback was an essential part, aligned with Li & Vuono's (2019, p.94) understanding of corrective feedback, defined as feedback that helps learners understand the accuracy of their language output. Confidence was another

central condition. The students felt they had greater ease in speaking English after doing the activities. One student said: ‘now I’m not too shy when I speak English, especially in small groups’. This echoes Ahmetovic et al. (2020, p.276) who found that anxiety may hinder learners initially, though could also inform extrinsically driven motivation and engagement with learning a language.

5. Overall Engagement and Learning Experience

Students reported a strong preference for interactive speaking activities over textbook activities. They expressed appreciation for the topics’ relevance and opportunity to meaningfully engage in English. As one student simply summarized, “I like when we talk about hobbies - it’s easier and more fun than just reading.”

A positive and exuberant classroom community was paramount. The teachers’ enthusiasm and peer support inspired students. These social factors represent the key principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which assert interaction as the basis of language learning (Azizova & Gapparova, 2021, p.15). Based on the results of conversation activities, creating spaces that afford students positive opportunities to take risks, express themselves, and provide outlets to make gradual incremental progress in their speaking skills, is attainable.

CONCLUSION

The researcher considers the information gathered from observations, interviews with students and teachers, and various documents, to conclude that the students’ ability to speak has improved through their use of conversation activities. Through analysis of the data, several findings emerged:

1. Students became more engaged and eager to participate as they became comfortable with the conversation activities.
2. Gain in vocabulary and fluency took place through everyday contact with communicative, actual practice.
3. The interaction with peers and teacher’s responses helped the students in their improvement in pronunciation and boosted their self-confidence.
4. A supportive, communicative classroom environment significantly improved the motivation and engagement of the students.

These findings support the previous literature on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); moreover, they demonstrate how effective student-centered conversation activities can be in helping students to learn the English Language. Through conversation exercises students are able to manipulate and use the language with minimal anxiety and at the same improve their language competence in a meaningful and engaging and authentic way.

REFERENCES

- Ahmetović, E., Bećirović, S., & Dubravac, V. (2020). Motivation, Anxiety and Students' Performance. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 9(2), 271–289. <https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2020.2.271>
- Aneski, F. M. (2022). The Implementation of English Speaking Activities on Students at Modern Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School, Panaragan Jaya, Tulang Bawang Barat. *Journal of English Development*, 2(2), 109–116.
- Azizova, M. M., & Gapparova, A. N. (2021). The Effective Methods and Principles of Communicative Language Teaching. *Academic Research in Educational Sciences*, 2(Special Issue 1), 15–20.
- Beshir, M., & Yigzaw, A. (2022). Students' Self-repair in EFL Classroom Interactions: Implications for Classroom Dynamics. *Asian Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 7(26). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00153-6>
- Daar, G. F. (2020). Problems of English Language Learning in Context (Based on Some Studies in Manggarai) (1st Ed.). Ruteng: PKBM Sambu Poleng.
- Heale, R., & Twycross, A. (2018). What is a case study? *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 21(1), 7–8. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2017-102845>
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). Qualitative Research Methods (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd. ISBN: 9781473903913.
- Hinkel, E. (2006). Current Perspectives on Teaching the Four Skills. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 109–131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264513>
- Khaliliaqdam, S. (2014). ZPD, Scaffolding, and Basic Speech Development in EFL context. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 891–897. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.495>
- Li, S., & Vuono, A. (2019). Twenty-five Years of Research on Oral and Written Corrective Feedback. *System*, 84, 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.04.006>

- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429203114>
- Pillai, A. A., & Kaushal, U. (2020). Research Methodology – An Introduction to Literary Studies. *Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy and Culture*, 1(1).
- Suparman, L. (2017). The Effectiveness of the English Conversation to Improve Students' Speaking Skill. *PALAPA*, 5(2), 38–52. <https://doi.org/10.36088/palapa.v5i2.45>
- Swain, M. (2005). The Output Hypothesis: Theory and Research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 471–483). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410612700-34>
- Tavares, V. (2016). *The Role of Peer Interaction and Second Language Learning for ESL Students in Academic Contexts: An Extended Literature Review*. (Master's thesis, York University) YorkSpace. <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/handle/10315/32261>
- Wang, L. (2023). The Impact of Student-Centered Learning on Academic Motivation and Achievement: A Comparative Research between Traditional Instruction and Student-Centered Approach. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v22i.12463>