

Improving Speaking Skill of the Seventh-Grade Students through ESA

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills are crucial for effective communication and a cornerstone of language learning. However, many seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2024/2025 exhibited deficiencies in their speaking skills, characterized by shyness and fear of making mistakes. This research aimed to investigate whether the implementation of the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique could significantly improve the speaking skills of these students. A classroom action research approach was employed, involving two cycles of data collection through pre-tests, post-tests, and student questionnaires. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in the students' mean scores from the pre-test to the post-test, indicating the effectiveness of the ESA technique.¹ Furthermore, the questionnaire revealed positive student feedback regarding the implementation of this approach. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the ESA technique is an effective strategy for enhancing the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2024/2025.

Keywords: speaking skill, ESA (Engage, Study, Activate)

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a fundamental human skill, essential for social interaction and communication. Throughout history, speech has been the primary means of conveying information, highlighting its crucial role in daily life. Mastering speaking allows individuals to effectively communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions. As Thornbury (2005) suggests, while often taken for granted due to its everyday nature, speaking is a vital activity that underpins much of our social interaction. Harmer (2001) emphasizes that proficient speaking skills enable clear and confident communication, facilitating information exchange and language practice. Bagus (2022) highlights the expressive

power of speaking, enabling individuals to articulate their inner thoughts and feelings. Richards (2008) adds that adapting speaking style to the context is a key aspect of effective communication, shaping social and situational interactions. Speaking is thus crucial for language acquisition and daily communication, allowing individuals to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences.

Effective language teaching requires appropriate techniques tailored to students' needs. Harmer (2001) advocates for diverse teaching strategies that cater to different learning styles, positively influencing learning outcomes, especially in speaking. Employing engaging and enjoyable

techniques creates a conducive learning environment, fostering active participation and comprehension. This approach ultimately improves overall student performance. Teachers must carefully select effective teaching techniques to achieve desired learning objectives and create a dynamic and stimulating classroom.

Students at SMPN 2 Ubud face significant challenges in developing speaking skills, impacting both academic performance and social interactions. Common issues include fluency difficulties, mispronunciation, and grammatical errors. These challenges are compounded by traditional teaching methods that often lack engagement and fail to motivate students. Joni & Wirastuti (2018) highlight the influence of self-efficacy on speaking ability. To address these challenges and boost student confidence, the researcher implemented the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique.

The ESA technique, as described by Harmer (2007), offers a structured and effective approach to teaching speaking. The "Engage" phase captures student interest and motivates them to learn. The "Study" phase focuses on language structure and vocabulary development. Finally, the "Activate" phase

provides opportunities for practical application in communicative contexts. This creates a flexible and interactive learning environment, making learning more engaging and enjoyable while enhancing speaking skills. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that these three components are fundamental to effective language teaching.

Students at SMPN 2 Ubud often struggle with speaking skills, particularly descriptive speaking. A lack of enthusiasm coupled with unengaging teaching methods hinders their progress. Effective teaching techniques are crucial for improving speaking skills. This research explores the potential of the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique to address these challenges. The central research question guiding this study is: Can the speaking skill of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud in the 2024/2025 academic year be improved through the ESA technique?

This research aims to answer the aforementioned research question. Scientific research requires clear objectives to guide data collection and analysis. The purpose of this study is to investigate and provide a solution to the speaking challenges faced by the students. Specifically, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of the ESA

technique in improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud during the 2024/2025 academic year.

This study focuses specifically on enhancing speaking skills through the ESA technique with seventh-grade students during the 2024/2025 academic year. This targeted approach allows for a detailed analysis of the technique's impact on speaking skill. Aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka and its learning objectives (specifically 9.8, which focuses on producing various simple written and spoken texts in multimodal form), this research is further delimited to descriptive monologues about places, animals, people, and things. This focus allows for the development of clear and effective communication skills within a specific context. Furthermore, the study aligns with the Kurikulum Merdeka's fourth main competency, encompassing daily conversations, oral presentations, and active class participation, providing actionable insights into improving students' oral communication.

This research, "Improving Speaking Skill Through Engage, Study, Activate For Seventh- Grade Students In The Academic Year 2024/2025," aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of the ESA technique in enhancing students' speaking abilities. The

study anticipates positive student responses and aims to provide valuable insights for teachers seeking to improve speaking instruction. The findings will also serve as a valuable resource for future researchers. Theoretically, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on speaking skill development and the application of the ESA technique. It is also intended to serve as a guide for future research involving classroom action research, speaking skills, and the ESA approach. Practically, the findings offer guidance to teachers, students, and other researchers.

Theoretically, this study aims to contribute to the development of speaking skill theory by exploring the use of the ESA technique. It is expected to serve as a reference for future studies related to classroom action research, speaking skills, and the ESA approach. The findings will also inform the selection of appropriate teaching strategies for English, particularly for speaking. Ultimately, this research aims to provide evidence that the ESA technique is an effective strategy for improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud.

Practically, this study offers valuable guidance to teachers, students, and

researchers. Teachers can utilize the ESA technique to enhance their speaking instruction and improve student learning outcomes. This technique can also make English learning more engaging for seventh-grade students, increasing their interest and skill. For students, the study offers a potential pathway to overcome obstacles in speaking English. The results can also serve as a valuable reference for future research and educational practices.

Key terms used in this study, "speaking skill" and "ESA technique," are operationally defined to ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings. "Speaking skill" refers to the ability of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud to perform descriptive monologues about places and animals in spoken form, adhering to a standard descriptive monologue format (Identification, Description, and Conclusion) and assessed using a rubric that considers fluency, comprehension, and grammar. The "ESA technique" is a three-phase approach: "Engage" (activities to generate student interest), "Study" (focus on language features like grammar, fluency, and comprehension), and "Activate" (application of learned knowledge through descriptive monologues). These definitions provide a clear foundation

for understanding the study's focus and methodology.

RESEARCH METHODS

This classroom action research study investigates the challenges faced by seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud in developing their speaking skills, particularly their ability to express themselves confidently and fluently. The subjects of this study are the 34 students (16 male, 18 female) in class 7B, who have demonstrated difficulties in speaking English fluently, expressing ideas clearly, and understanding spoken English. This group was selected to explore methods for improving their speaking skill.

This research employs a classroom action research (CAR) design, a cyclical process of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting, ideally suited for improving spoken English in a classroom setting. As Mertler (in Ary et al., 2010) suggests, CAR encourages collaboration among educators, with teachers playing a key role in the process. It's not just about research, but about practical improvement through lesson planning, homework assignments, and classroom environment design. Burns (2023) emphasizes the value of

CAR in improving teaching skills and understanding the classroom dynamic. It empowers teachers to address classroom challenges through self-reflection and systematic investigation. Ferrance (2000) highlights the use of research techniques to analyze educational practices. In this study, CAR is used to identify and address the students' speaking challenges, with the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique being implemented as a practical strategy.

The CAR process, as described by Kemmis and McTaggart (in Burns, 2010), involves four steps in each cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This study follows a cyclical model, with each cycle consisting of two sessions. Each session incorporates these four phases. An initial reflection, conducted before teaching begins, establishes a baseline of student speaking skills. Subsequent cycles are implemented based on the results of the previous cycle, continuing until students achieve the minimum passing grade. This cyclical approach allows for continuous refinement of teaching strategies based on student progress and feedback. The procedure for this research adapts the Kemmis and McTaggart model, incorporating an initial reflection before the

first cycle and ongoing reflection throughout the process.

This study uses pre-tests, post-tests, and questionnaires as research instruments. The tests, designed as extensive speaking tasks (Brown, 2004), assess student speaking skills, focusing on fluency, comprehension, and grammar using a scoring rubric. The questionnaires, administered in Bahasa Indonesia after each cycle, gather student feedback on the ESA technique and their learning experiences. Data from these instruments are analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the ESA technique. The mean score formula is used to analyze pre- and post-test data. Questionnaire data is analyzed to determine the percentage of student responses to each item. The success indicator for this research is an 80% success rate, meaning that 28 out of the 34 students must achieve a score of 75 or higher (the minimum passing grade) on the speaking assessment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This classroom action research study, conducted with seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud during the 2024/2025 academic year, investigated the effectiveness of the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique in improving their speaking skills, specifically their

ability to deliver descriptive monologues. The heterogeneous class of 34 students initially struggled with fluency, comprehension, and grammatical accuracy, exhibiting a lack of interest in speaking due to perceived difficulty. Data was collected through pre-tests, post-tests (administered at the end of each cycle), and a questionnaire. The pre-test established a baseline, while the post-tests measured progress after each cycle's implementation of the ESA technique. The questionnaire, administered at the end of the second cycle, gathered student feedback on their experiences with the ESA method. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in student speaking performance across the three testing periods (pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2). The questionnaire data provided further insights into student perceptions of the ESA technique, offering additional support for its effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills.

Pre-Cycle

Prior to implementing the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique, a pre-cycle assessment was conducted to evaluate the seventh-grade students' existing speaking abilities. This involved preliminary observations of the 7B class at SMPN 2 Ubud, including an interview with the English teacher and direct classroom observations. These initial steps aimed to understand the classroom context, identify existing teaching strategies, and pinpoint the specific speaking challenges faced by the students. This information provided a foundation

for designing the first cycle of the research intervention.

The interview with the English teacher revealed that the students struggled significantly with speaking, particularly with monologues. Common difficulties included fluency, comprehension, and grammatical accuracy. The teacher also noted that the minimum passing grade for English was 72, and that the current instructional focus on reading, rather than speaking, had proven ineffective in addressing these speaking challenges. This lack of emphasis on speaking negatively impacted student understanding, motivation, and willingness to engage with the English language. The researcher, recognizing the need for a more effective approach, chose to implement the ESA technique.

Classroom observations corroborated the teacher's assessment. Student engagement during speaking activities was low, with many students appearing uninterested and hesitant to participate. Only a few higher-proficiency students demonstrated confidence and enthusiasm, highlighting the need for more engaging and effective teaching methods to encourage broader participation and improve overall speaking skills.

To establish a baseline measurement of student speaking abilities, a pre-test was administered before the implementation of the ESA technique. The pre-test consisted of two descriptive monologue topics, which students performed in front of the class and recorded via

WhatsApp voice notes (with a five-minute time limit). These recordings were evaluated using a scoring rubric that assessed fluency, comprehension, and grammar. The total score obtained from the 34 students was 1694, resulting in a mean score of 49.82. The pre-test results revealed significant challenges in speaking, including fluency issues, grammatical errors, and difficulties with comprehending and constructing coherent monologues. Only six students achieved the minimum passing grade, demonstrating a general lack of confidence and speaking speaking.

Cycle I

Following the pre-cycle assessment, which revealed significant weaknesses in student speaking abilities, Cycle 1 was implemented using the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique. Given the low pre-test scores, which fell well below the minimum passing grade, a more effective teaching approach was clearly needed. Cycle 1 consisted of two 120-minute sessions (240 minutes total) and followed the four cyclical stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The planning stage involved developing a comprehensive lesson plan aligned with the SMPN 2 Ubud English syllabus, creating learning materials focused on descriptive monologues, designing accompanying practice worksheets, and developing a post-test to assess learning outcomes.

Cycle 1's action phase involved two offline classroom sessions where the ESA

technique was implemented. The researcher introduced descriptive monologue material, facilitated classroom activities, guided discussions, and provided feedback. Students worked on worksheets consisting of five questions. Throughout these sessions, student behavior, participation, and learning progress were closely observed and documented. In Session 2, the researcher reviewed the descriptive monologue lesson, students chose a topic, prepared their monologues, and then performed them in front of the class. The Cycle 1 post-test was then administered, requiring students to deliver a descriptive monologue within a five-minute time limit. Feedback and reinforcement were provided following these activities.

During the teaching and learning process, the researcher observed classroom dynamics to gauge the effectiveness of the ESA technique. While some students showed improved interest and actively participated, others remained disengaged, struggling with the material and worksheets. This highlighted the need for strategies to further enhance engagement in the next cycle. A post-test 1, administered at the end of Session 2, showed improvement in student speaking skills, with the total score reaching 2243 and a mean score of 65.97, compared to the pre-test mean score of 49.82. While 18 students achieved the minimum passing grade, indicating progress, some students still struggled with fluency, comprehension, and grammar. Because the success indicator had not been met, the

researcher proceeded with Cycle 2.

Cycle II

Because the success indicator (minimum passing grade) was not fully achieved in Cycle 1, a second cycle was implemented. Based on the results and observations from Cycle 1, the researcher revised the teaching and learning process. Like Cycle 1, Cycle 2 consisted of two sessions and followed the same four cyclical phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The planning phase for Cycle 2 involved redesigning the lesson plan, learning materials, worksheets, and post-test 2, incorporating insights gained from Cycle 1. The lesson plan was again divided into two sessions (Sessions 3 and 4), with learning materials focused on descriptive place or animal descriptions. Worksheets were designed to provide practice opportunities, and a post-test was developed to assess learning outcomes.

Cycle 2's action phase mirrored the structure of Cycle 1, with two 120-minute offline classroom sessions. The ESA technique was again implemented, with a focus on maximizing student engagement. Session 3 introduced a new descriptive topic, encouraged student questions, and facilitated exploration through discussions and worksheet activities. Students prepared and performed their monologues, receiving feedback and encouragement to revise. Session 4 followed a similar format, with a review of the material and further practice. Students performed revised

monologues, followed by a discussion, corrections, and a summary of challenges encountered. Post-test 2 was then administered.

During Cycle 2, student engagement significantly increased, likely due to the incorporation of more examples. Students actively participated in discussions, demonstrated improved focus, and maintained a positive learning environment. This enhanced engagement contributed to a more effective learning experience and improved speaking skills. Post-test 2 results showed a significant improvement, with a mean score of 82.35 and 32 out of 34 students achieving the minimum passing grade. This positive outcome indicated that the research objectives were met, and the classroom action research study was successfully concluded.

This classroom action research study investigated the effects of the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique on improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud during the 2024/2025 academic year. The study employed a cyclical classroom action research methodology, consisting of two cycles, each with two sessions, and utilized pre- and post-tests along with questionnaires for data collection. The research process involved the four key activities of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The pre-cycle assessment, which included an interview with the English teacher and classroom observations, revealed significant

challenges in students' pre-existing speaking abilities, particularly in fluency, comprehension, and grammar. A pre-test, evaluated using a scoring rubric, confirmed these difficulties. While Cycle 1, implementing the ESA technique, showed some improvement (a 16.15-point increase in the mean score from 49.82 to 65.97), it did not fully achieve the desired level of success. Therefore, the researcher proceeded to Cycle 2 with revised lesson plans and strategies, ultimately seeing 32 out of 34 students pass in this cycle.

Cycle 2 demonstrated substantial gains in student speaking skills, with a significant increase in the mean score (to 82.35). Students actively engaged in the learning process, showing improved fluency, comprehension, and grammatical accuracy in their descriptive monologues. This progress, evident from the pre-cycle through Cycle 2, suggests that the ESA technique effectively facilitated student learning and led to noticeable improvements in their speaking abilities. The significant increase in the mean score across the testing periods indicates that the research objectives were achieved, concluding the classroom action research study.

To further support these findings, a questionnaire was administered to gauge student perceptions of the ESA technique. The results overwhelmingly indicated student satisfaction with the approach and its positive impact on their speaking skills. Students reported that the ESA technique created a favorable learning

environment, boosting their enthusiasm for speaking and encouraging collaboration and idea development. This classroom action research concludes that the ESA technique effectively enhances the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud, supporting previous research on the method's efficacy. The positive results from the pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2, along with the favorable questionnaire responses, confirm the successful implementation of the ESA technique in improving student speaking skill.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the ESA technique's impact, beyond the post-test scores, a questionnaire was administered to students at the end of Cycle II. This instrument aimed to capture their perceptions and experiences with the approach. The questionnaire, consisting of ten statements, offered five response options: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree. The results revealed overwhelmingly positive student reactions to the ESA technique. Specifically, the analysis showed that 40.41% of respondents strongly agreed and 51.01% agreed that ESA helped improve their speaking skills. Only a small fraction (8.57%) expressed uncertainty, while no students disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings strongly suggest that students perceived the ESA technique as a valuable tool for enhancing their speaking abilities, contributing to their overall positive learning experience. In conclusion, the

questionnaire data reinforces the findings from the tests, providing strong evidence of ESA's effectiveness in improving students' speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) technique offers a valuable and effective approach to teaching speaking to seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud during the 2024/2025 academic year. The remarkable increase in student mean scores from the initial pre-test to the post-tests in Cycle I and Cycle II provides compelling evidence of substantial growth in speaking skill. Beyond the quantitative data, observations of student performance revealed a qualitative shift: students demonstrated not only greater accuracy but also increased confidence and fluency in their spoken English. In Cycle II, the overwhelming majority of students (94%) surpassed the minimum passing grade, showcasing a marked improvement in their ability to construct and deliver descriptive monologues. These performances were characterized by enhanced fluency, clearer comprehension, and more accurate grammar, accompanied by a noticeable increase in student engagement and enthusiasm throughout the learning process. This qualitative shift in student performance, observed across the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II, strongly suggests that the ESA technique fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of spoken

English, ultimately empowering students to communicate more effectively.

Complementing these performance-based observations, student feedback gathered through questionnaires provided rich qualitative insights into the impact of the ESA technique. The overwhelmingly positive responses revealed that students perceived ESA as a highly effective tool for improving their speaking skills. Students reported feeling more engaged and motivated during ESA-based lessons, citing the structured approach as particularly helpful in building their confidence and fluency. Many students commented on the value of the "Engage" phase in sparking their interest and creating a comfortable learning environment, while the "Study" and "Activate" phases provided them with the tools and opportunities they needed to practice and refine their speaking skills. Classroom observations further enriched this qualitative understanding, with teachers noting a significant increase in student participation, creativity, and willingness to take risks with spoken English during ESA implementation. In essence, the qualitative data paints a picture of students not just improving their technical skills but also developing a more positive and empowered relationship with spoken English. Therefore, this study concludes that the ESA technique is a highly effective and well-received method for cultivating speaking skill in seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud, fostering skill development.

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