The Implementation of Peer Interaction to Enhance Students' English Speaking Skills

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Abstract	Article Info
This Classroom Action Research investigated the effectiveness of the peer interaction strategy in enhancing tenth-grade students' speaking skills at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah. The study was conducted over two cycles with seven meetings, including six treatment sessions, followed by the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. The results demonstrated significant improvement, with the average score rising from 67.4 in cycle 1 (52.4% meeting the minimum competency criterion) to 75.8 in cycle 2 (80% meeting the criterion). The findings indicate that peer interaction fosters a more engaging and supportive classroom environment, making it a practical approach to improving speaking skills. This study provides valuable insights into systematically implementing peer interaction in EFL classrooms, offering educators innovative, socially interactive learning strategies to enhance students' confidence and proficiency in English communication.	

Introduction

Speaking is a key skill in EFL learning, as many students prioritize it for communication, with Richards and Renandya (2020) emphasizing its vital role in language proficiency. However, many EFL students, especially in Indonesia, struggle with low participation and anxiety in speaking classes, leading to limited oral proficiency that fails to meet expected standards (Daar, 2020; Padmadewi, 1998; Tutyandari, 2005).

One of the main challenges students face in speaking English is a lack of confidence. Other obstacles include difficulties in pronunciation and limited opportunities to practice speaking in class. Based on the researcher's experience during field practice at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah, many students feel embarrassed to talk in English due to a lack of practice opportunities. Additionally, their enthusiasm for learning English, particularly in speaking skills, remains low because learning methods do not actively engage them. As a result, students tend to listen more than speak, which hinders their conversational skills and makes it difficult for them to express ideas in discussions.

Social interaction is essential for developing students' speaking skills in language learning, as effective learning occurs when teachers implement practice-based strategies (Englert in Irianto & Nurniati, 2003). Kissinger (2009) highlights that peer interaction and active participation enhance speaking proficiency, making interactive learning strategies crucial for boosting students' confidence and communication skills. This study examines the impact of the peer interaction strategy on improving students' confidence, fluency, and speaking skills in English classrooms. This approach promotes active participation by shifting learning from teacher-centered to student-centered, particularly benefiting low-confidence students (Corral, 2018). Peer interaction not only enhances communication skills but also fosters social development. While challenges in learning spoken English in Indonesia have been widely discussed, research on peer interaction as a solution remains limited. This study provides new insights into systematically implementing this strategy in EFL classrooms, offering innovative learning methods to improve students' speaking proficiency.

Theoretical review

Extensive research on acquiring a foreign language indicates that an effective learning environment should offer meaningful social interactions between learners and native speakers of the second language (Fang, W. C., et al. 2018). This interaction is essential for mastering both linguistic and socio-linguistic rules. (Krashen, 1981). Pica (1987) asserts explicitly that the most effective social interaction for language development occurs when learners and their conversation partners share a genuine need and desire to understand each other. To successfully comprehend and produce language, learners must adjust their conversations to leverage this mutual motivation, facilitating language acquisition.

From this perspective, it can be said that peer interaction holds significant linguistic value for students in academic language classrooms. In the second language acquisition (SLA) literature, peer interaction is described as any communicative activity between learners, with little to no involvement from the teacher (Philp, J., Adams, R., & Iwashita, N,2013). Allwright (1984) suggests that peer conversations in the classroom are valuable, emphasizing that "peer discussions can enhance learning." Learners engaging in discussions and sharing their understanding often lead to improved comprehension. Peers can learn from each other or benefit from articulating their knowledge. Kohn and Vajda (1975) highlight the importance of small-group interactions and peer-mediated instruction in academic ESL classes, emphasizing how these activities empower students to become more communicative learners. Such activities offer numerous opportunities for developing and acquiring language skills in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Researchers have explored the intricate connections between peer interaction and linguistic ability in content-specific classes in higher education. Recent studies, in particular, examine how an international student's communicative competence in English—or the lack of it—can either enhance or limit opportunities for conversational interactions in academic settings and the broader context of higher education (Hung, H. L. & Hyun, E, 2010). Research highlights that interacting with highly proficient peers and engaging in classroom oral activities (such as pair work and small-group discussions) pose significant challenges for students who speak English as a second language, often affecting their overall experience in higher education abroad.

However, interactions in content classes tend to be less structured and may require participants to exchange more information to construct meaning rather than simply engaging in pre-planned activities focusing on information exchange and often having predetermined correct answers aligned with the instructor's expectations.

Method

The research method employed in this study is Classroom Action Research. Mettetal (2001) stated that classroom action research is a method of finding out what works best in your classroom to improve students' learning. There are various approaches to enhancing teaching knowledge; some educators engage in personal reflection, while others conduct formal empirical studies on teaching and learning. Additionally, D. Hopkins (2014), in his book A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research, describes action research as a form of self-reflective inquiry carried out by participants in a social or educational setting. Its purpose is to enhance the rationality and effectiveness of their educational practices, deepen their understanding of these practices, and improve the contexts in which they are implemented.

The action research model consists of four key steps in a cycle. In the first step, planning, the researcher introduced a strategy to improve students' speaking skills through peer interaction, following a structured lesson plan. Teaching and learning materials were prepared, lesson plans were developed, observation sheets were created for classroom monitoring, and necessary teaching aids and test instruments were arranged to support the learning process.

The second step, acting, involved implementing the strategy in the classroom. The primary researcher took on the role of the English teacher, executing the lesson plan systematically. To ensure effectiveness, the researcher fostered a supportive classroom atmosphere, managed student activities, and provided assistance when needed. In the third step, observing, an observer was assigned to monitor the researcher's teaching performance and the students' participation. The observer assessed students' speaking improvement by analyzing their engagement in discussions, exercises, and spoken test results. The fourth step, reflecting, involved reviewing classroom events and evaluating both the process and outcomes. This reflection helped determine the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy, guiding decisions for the next cycle of improvement. The analysis ensured continuous enhancement of the speaking learning process through peer interaction. The cycle

continues until students achieve the minimum target score set by the school's Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM), 75 for English at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah. The success criteria for this classroom action research are that most students should achieve high competency scores in English speaking, with a target of 80% of students meeting the KKM standard, so any student scoring 74 or below has not met the KKM requirement.

This study was conducted in two cycles: pre-test and post-test. The research involved 21 tenth-grade students in the second-semester SMA Islam Sabilunnajah, Seputih Raman, Lampung, in the 2024/2025 academic year, throughout six meetings, with three meetings for each cycle.

The research utilized interviews, observations, and tests as instruments. Pre-tests and post-tests (Post-test 1 and Post-test 2) were conducted before and after the intervention to assess improvements in students' speaking skills. Brown (2004) developed a speaking scoring rubric to evaluate performance. The researcher played a dual role as an observer and implementer of the peer interaction strategy.

Quantitative data analysis was used to measure student progress. The researcher analyzed the test results by comparing students' speaking skills before and after the intervention. The speaking score was calculated based on fluency, pronunciation, grammar, comprehension, confidence, and delivery. The total score was then multiplied by 4. For example, if a student received 25 points (5 points per category), their final speaking score would be 100.

Results

The study was conducted over seven sessions with second-semester Senior High School students. The researcher started the research by carrying out preliminary research. This initial phase occurred during the first two weeks before the main investigation. The preliminary study aimed to gather information and observe the English teaching and learning process at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah, particularly in the tenth grade. To achieve this, the researcher observed the students' English learning activities in class and conducted interviews with both the students of the tenth grade and their English teacher, focusing on the process of learning English, especially speaking skills.

The result of the pre-observation revealed that students showed little interest in learning English, as reflected in their reactions to the subject. Some students were

disengaged, focusing on personal activities or remaining silent rather than paying attention to the lesson. Others appeared indifferent, often falling asleep in class despite the teacher's attempts to prevent it. Additionally, two students disliked being in the classroom and frequently requested permission to leave. On the other hand, some students appeared genuinely interested in learning English. They were noticeably active in class, often urging their peers to remain quiet and focus on the teacher's instructions. These students were not hesitant to ask questions when they did not understand the material. When assignments were given, some completed them independently, while others worked collaboratively.

Subsequently, the pre-interview results indicated that most students struggled with learning due to the teacher's irregular attendance, leading to gaps in their understanding. While some students found speaking English manageable, others faced difficulties, especially with pronunciation. Most had not been taught specific strategies to improve their speaking skills, relying instead on self-learning methods like listening to English songs. Only a few had received guidance, mainly through extensive reading. Assignments were typically textbook exercises, later reviewed in class.

The pre-interview with the English teacher revealed that all students actively participated in learning, though their English performance varied. Some scored above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), while others met or fell below it. The teacher observed differences in pronunciation skills, with some students speaking fluently while others struggled. No alternative strategies had been implemented to enhance speaking skills. However, the teacher believed a peer interaction strategy could help improve students' speaking abilities and overall language comprehension.

The study took place over seven sessions, divided into two cycles. The outcomes of each cycle were analyzed through four stages of Classroom Action Research (CAR): (1) planning, (2) implementation, (3) observation, and (4) reflection.

Cycle 1

In the planning stage, the researcher developed lesson plans for teaching exposition texts. These plans were designed for implementation in treatments 1 and 2, incorporating peer interaction strategies for learning exposition texts. The next stage, acting, involved the researcher conducting four classroom sessions.

The first session was dedicated to administering a pre-test with three things to tell their peers. Similarly, the fourth session was used for a post-test on the same topic. The third stage of Classroom Action Research (CAR), observation, was carried out alongside the second stage. Throughout the four sessions, the researcher observed the students. The steps for action and observation are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Meetings in cycle 1

Meeting	Acting	Observing
	Topic	Activity
1	Pre-test	Students were paired and asked to converse on assigned topics, including hobbies, memorable experiences, and the importance of learning English.
2	Treatment 1: exposition text	The students discussed the exposition text using a peer interaction strategy. The researcher gave them a picture of *ketoprak* to discuss. Each group was instructed to develop a dialogue about *ketoprak* based on the initial discussion questions and read it out loud in front of the class.
3	Treatment 2: exposition text	Students listened to and read aloud a dialogue about graffiti from the textbook. After the researcher explained the concept and highlighted opinion-related expressions, they discussed the dialogue in groups, identified key phrases, and presented their findings to the class.
4	Treatment 3: exposition text Post-test	Students discussed five true-or-false statements about the previous dialogue in groups. They then created four related questions and conducted peer interviews, with each student asking one question. The researcher observed and monitored the discussions. The post-test one was conducted after the learning session was completed by doing the same thing as the pretest.

The final session of Cycle 1 focused on reflection. In this stage, the researcher analyzed observations from the teaching and learning process. It began with the pre-test, which was generally completed well, though some students struggled. The average pretest score was 55.9, or 38.1% of students scored above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). In contrast, the remaining 13 students scored below it, which is considered low compared to the target of 80% of students meeting the KKM standard. This analysis indicates that most tenth-grade students at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah still struggle with English-speaking skills.

During the treatments, the researcher observed how students engaged in discussions using the peer interaction strategy. In the first treatment, students appeared confused and required constant guidance at every step. They were hesitant

to speak English, especially when asking questions, and struggled to express their ideas, which posed a challenge for the classroom action research.

However, by the end of the treatment, students began to show more confidence. Some started actively participating in discussions, expressing their ideas, and even asking about their pronunciation. This progress was reflected in an improved post-test 1 score of 67.4, or 52.4% of students had met the KKM score, reflecting a 20.5% improvement compared to the pre-test results. The findings from cycle 1 revealed both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, students progressed in speaking English while interacting with their peers. On the negative side, some students remained passive and had no enthusiasm. To enhance learning quality and improve overall performance, revisions were necessary. Consequently, Cycle 2 was conducted to continue the research.

Cycle 2

This cycle consisted of three steps. During the planning stage, the researcher revised the lesson plan to address the noise and disturbances observed in the previous treatment. A video about the importance of art was shown to create a different learning atmosphere. Students were then asked to take notes and summarize key points using the same peer interaction strategy to capture their attention. The acting stage included three meetings, as the pre-test for this cycle was taken from the post-test of the previous cycle, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Meetings in Cycle 2

Meeting	Acting	Observing
	Topic	Activity
1	Treatment 4: exposition text	Students analyzed a video about exposition text in pairs and discussed the structure.
2	Treatment 5: exposition text	The students recalled their discussion about the importance of art, made a short exposition, and presented it.
3	Treatment 2: exposition text	Students discussed and analyzed the text "Why Art Can Give Us Catharsis and Healing" in pairs. They then wrote a paragraph expressing their opinions on the connection between art and healing and presented their ideas. After the learning session, Post-Test 2 was conducted using the same format as the previous tests, but the researcher added questions about their personal information.

This section reflects on observations from cycle 2, which showed significant improvement in students' English-speaking skills. The researcher and the English teacher were pleased with the progress, as students demonstrated greater engagement, improved collaboration, and active participation in class activities and pair assignments. Students also enhanced their pronunciation and gained confidence in speaking English. In addition, the improvement rate in students' English-speaking skills reached 80%, reflecting a 12.4% improvement compared to the post-test 1 results, matching the success criteria for student participation. This confirmed that the second cycle had effectively met its target.

As a result, the Classroom Action Research concluded after cycle 2, with 80% of students achieving the required proficiency. The remaining 20% would receive additional support from the English teacher using the same strategy. A detailed breakdown of test scores is available in Table 3.

Table 3. Improvement of students' scores on the test

No.	Test	Students' speaking score		Average	Percentage
		Lowest	Highest		
1	Pre-test	28	84	55.9	38.1%
2	Post-test 1	40	88	67.4	52.4%
3	Post-test 2	48	88	75.8	80%

Based on the description and table above, there was a significant improvement in the percentage of students who met the KKM standard. Only 38.1% (8 students) passed the pre-test, while the remaining 13 scored below the KKM. A notable increase was observed in the first post-test, where 11 out of 21 students (52.4%) met the criteria. The progress continued in the second post-test, with 17 students (80%) surpassing the KKM, showing further improvement from the first post-test. This indicates that the second post-test was successful, exceeding the Classroom Action Research (CAR) success criterion of 80.9% of students meeting the standard. These results confirm that implementing peer interaction effectively enhanced students' English-speaking skills.

Discussion

This research began to improve speaking ability by using a peer interaction strategy in tenth-grade students at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah. Through two cycles, three tests, and six treatments, teaching and learning were carried out and ran well on the second-semester students of the Senior high school level. Research indicates

that structured peer interactions enhance students' pronunciation, confidence, and overall engagement in learning English. Observations, interviews, and test scores revealed noticeable improvements, with students demonstrating increased motivation and willingness to speak in class. The findings align with previous studies, reinforcing the positive impact of peer interaction on language development. Test results showed significant progress, with average scores increasing from 55.9 in the pretest to 75.8 in the second posttest, and 80% of students meeting the success criteria. These results highlight the effectiveness of peer interaction as a strategy for improving students' English-speaking skills.

Conclusion

The Classroom Action Research conducted at SMA Islam Sabilunnajah in the 2024/2025 academic year aimed to improve tenth-grade students' English-speaking skills through peer interaction. Several effective techniques were identified, including encouraging students to communicate exclusively in English, allowing independent discussions, permitting mistakes to build confidence, and using pronunciation practice, presentations, and video materials to enhance learning.

Observations, interviews, and test scores confirmed significant progress. Students became more engaged, improved their pronunciation, gained confidence, and showed higher motivation. The teacher also recognized peer interaction as an effective strategy for enhancing speaking skills. Test results demonstrated notable improvement. In the pretest, only 38.1% of students met the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), with an average score of 55.9. After cycle 1, 52.4% of students exceeded the KKM, raising the average score to 67.4. By cycle 2, 80% of students had surpassed the KKM, successfully achieving the learning objectives.

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