

EMPOWERING YOUNG VOICES: ENHANCING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH VISUAL AIDS

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ABSTRACT

Speaking competence remains a major challenge for junior high school students learning English, as many struggle to express ideas confidently and interact fluently. Addressing this urgent issue, this study investigates the effectiveness of visual aids in enhancing students' speaking performance. Employing Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in two cycles, data were collected through observations, interviews, and pre- and post-tests. The findings reveal a meaningful descriptive improvement in students' speaking scores, rising from 2.94 (pre-test) to 3.45 (Cycle I) and 4.04 (Cycle II), reflecting a gradual improvement of 17.3% in Cycle I and 37.4% in Cycle II compared to the initial condition. Beyond measurable progress, visual aids also increased student motivation and active participation. The novelty of this study lies in integrating contextual and engaging visuals to stimulate communicative interaction. These results highlight the significant contribution of visual-based strategies in fostering meaningful and student-centered English learning, providing practical insights for teachers seeking to enhance speaking instruction through creative classroom media.

Keywords: *Classroom Action Research, Speaking Skills, Visual Aids*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of conveying messages from one individual to another to provide information, alter attitudes, perspectives, or behaviors, either directly through verbal means or indirectly through media (Safitriani & Jayadi, 2021). Among the four main language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—speaking skills are often considered the primary indicator of communication success. Individuals trying to learn speaking skills to be able to communicate with the global community (Rao, 2019). Speaking is a productive skill that involves conveying ideas and messages to others. This skill is an essential part of language use that focuses on meaning, wherein learners practice using the language they master to communicate directly (Newton & Nation, 2021).

As expressed by Zega (2025), speaking competence serves as a significant marker of language learning effectiveness. However, developing speaking skills presents complex challenges, especially for students learning

English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study of Mahtamawarmi (2019) found that students in rural areas of Indonesia face obstacles in speaking skills, which are influenced by various psychological factors as well as environmental conditions. As cited in Amoah and Yeboah (2021), Brown and Lee identified several factors that influence them include the grouping of utterances, repetition, abbreviated forms of language, performance variables, the use of everyday language, speaking speed, stress-rhythm-intonation patterns, the level of complexity, and the dynamics of interaction. Speaking skills can be enhanced through the use of engaging and relevant visual aids, as visual tools are capable of arousing interest, clarifying meaning, and reducing students' anxiety when speaking. Historically, visual aids have been an excellent resource for teaching and learning (Alabi, 2024; Qasserras, 2024; Walls, 2024). Visual elements serve as an essential visual aid that supports students' understanding through the delivery of informative, illustrative, and decorative meanings (Jamilah et al., 2024). Without visual aids, learning tends to have less impact on students' understanding (Alabi, 2024; Baskota, 2021; Mahmood et al., 2024).

Most junior high school students experience difficulties in expressing their ideas verbally to their peers or in front of the class (Jaelani & Zabidi, 2020; Palomargareta & Astutik, 2024). They tend to be afraid to speak and share ideas verbally due to various factors, including low motivation, lack of speaking practice in English, and low self-confidence (Kulsum et al., 2025; Rahmadani et al., 2024; Tridinanti, 2018). A less supportive learning environment further exacerbates the situation (Blanco, 2024). The limited opportunities for speaking practice, lack of interaction among students, and less varied teaching methods often make students feel bored and less interested in participating in speaking activities (Andriani et al., 2024; Sharma, 2024). Handayani (2020) mentions that junior high school students prefer to remain silent when teachers ask them to speak due to fear of making mistakes.

Those facts were also observed in one of the Junior High schools in South Sulawesi, seventh-grade students, although teachers sometimes use images as aids in English language learning, their effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills still requires further evaluation. However, in the learning speaking skill in the classroom, students often face various challenges that hinder their ability to

communicate effectively in English. One of the main issues in speaking skills is the limitation of vocabulary and understanding of grammar, which directly affects students' speaking performance. Limited vocabulary causes students to have difficulty finding the right words in oral communication, resulting in hesitation, incomplete utterances, and communication barriers that disrupt the smoothness of interaction. In addition, low mastery of grammar hinders students from constructing sentences correctly and effectively, which ultimately reduces their confidence when speaking. These conditions gradually decrease students' willingness to participate in oral communication and reinforce the tendency to avoid speaking practice. Additionally, Psychological factors such as speaking anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes also pose obstacles, as students worry about being ridiculed or corrected by their classmates. Furthermore, some students exhibit passive behavior in the classroom due to a lack of self-confidence or minimal motivation to speak in English. The researcher proposes an approach to address these obstacles through the use of visual aids. This study focuses on how visual aids can enhance students' speaking skills in English language learning at the junior high school level. By employing a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, this study is expected to contribute not only to the development of studies on the use of visual aids in speaking instruction but also to the formulation of more engaging and effective teaching methods for junior high school students.

MATERIALS

Speaking

Speaking skills play a fundamental role in the language learning process and are essential abilities needed to communicate effectively in various social, professional, academic, and personal situations (Mahato, 2023). Mastering speaking skills in English has become highly significant, considering that this language is one of the most recognized and globally used (Rao, 2019). Furthermore, when they travel, the students will not have any difficulty mingling and conversing with people from various nations (Raju et al., 2020). Depending on the goals of speaking, Nunan (2018) further divides speaking actions into categories. They fall under the categories of interpersonal, transactional, and expressive language. Using transactional language, the speaker may convey

goods or services to the listener. Moreover, the speaker's primary objective in using interpersonal language is to interact with others. Ultimately, acquiring goods and services within the social life circle is the ultimate purpose of expressive language. Additionally, Speaking skills in English are influenced by various inhibiting factors, such as language barriers, negative attitude, and Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA) (Mulyono et al., 2019)

The ability to speak a second or foreign language is understood as the ability to use language accurately, fluently, and appropriately in communication contexts (De Jong, 2023). In learning English, students need to master several main components, namely grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and comprehension (Dana & Aminatun, 2022). In addition, speaking skills also include micro skills and macro skills (Zhao & Lee, 2022). Micro skills relate to the ability to produce language elements such as sounds, words, phrases, intonation, and sentence stress, whereas macro skills encompass fluency, coherence, communicative function, language style, as well as the ability to interact effectively. Mastery of both aspects is very important because it can improve students' overall oral communication competence, especially in achieving speaking fluency as the primary goal of second language learning (Feng & Guo, 2022).

To determine acceptable speaking activities, speaking techniques are utilized. Erkinovna (2020) argues that teaching techniques must encompass a variety of learner needs, ranging from those emphasizing the accurate use of language to those focusing on communication, such as interaction, meaning conveying, and fluency in speaking. According to Newton and Nation (2021), task-based activities, such as information gaps, opinion gaps, storytelling, and role play, encourage students to exchange information, express opinions, or solve problems through authentic interaction. Such activities not only enhance speaking skills but also build students' fluency and confidence. They emphasize the importance of pushed output, which is the condition when students are motivated to actively produce language actively, thus making them aware of their language limitations and encouraging them to improve.

Speaking activities should be incorporated into learning to make it successful. Dewantara (2023) found several types of speaking ability assessment

tasks exist. The first type is an intensive speaking assessment, conducted through tests using images. The second type is a responsive speaking assessment, which involves role-playing activities. Furthermore, the third type is an interactive speaking assessment that also utilizes role-playing activities. Finally, there is an extensive speaking assessment, executed through storytelling activities. Teaching speaking to teenagers requires a deep psychological understanding and a supportive role from the teacher, as they need a safe and motivating learning environment to build confidence in speaking English (Marinić & Moritz, 2024). The process of teaching teenagers presents its own unique challenges, which differ from those of teaching children or adults. Speaking learning for teenagers presents different challenges compared to children or adults. In EFL classes, teenage students often experience boredom, lack of focus, and display behaviors that disrupt the learning process, thereby hindering teaching effectiveness (Nguyen & Tran, 2024; Xie, 2021). This condition is influenced by the emotional complexity of adolescents, where motivational and affective factors play a significant role in their engagement in language learning (Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore, teachers need to understand the characteristics of teenagers and implement appropriate learning strategies, including the use of visual aids to increase student interest and active participation in speaking activities (Marinić & Moritz, 2024).

Visual aids

Visual aids is a multifunctional tool because it can enhance motivation, understanding, and vocabulary acquisition among students in English language learning (Quecan, 2021). These aids include pictures, maps, drawings, graphics, and colours. They encourage students to easily understand and remember information, implying a specific meaning and allowing them to interact with hidden ideas.

Visual aids assist teachers in explaining concepts and ideas more meaningfully, approaching real-life situations, thus making learning more transparent, more engaging, interactive, and accessible. With visual aids, learning becomes more engaging, easier to understand, and has a more lasting impact on students (Pateşan et al., 2018). As observed by Gistituati et al. (2019), visual aids improve several aspects of speaking skills, including pronunciation,

fluency, and coherence. By reducing cognitive overload and providing concrete examples, visual aids also help students better understand and practice complex language patterns, thereby enhancing their overall speaking proficiency.

Safitriani and Jayadi (2021) mention in their book that the use of media in learning has several benefits, including: 1) Helping to simplify and enhance the process of language learning; 2) Increasing student motivation and interest in studying; 3) Clarifying new concepts to make them easier to understand and reducing misunderstandings; and 4) Making the learning process more engaging and interactive. Some scientists also indicate that the use of visual aids also makes a significant contribution to the overall learning process of language learners (Pateşan et al., 2018; Quecan, 2021). Other research findings reveal that the use of visual aids can enhance the motivation of language learners (Numonova, 2024). Several studies highlight that language learners display more positive responses and attitudes when visual aids are used in the classroom learning process (Almekhlafy & Alqahtani, 2020). This series of studies plays an important role because it reinforces the argument that visual aids have a beneficial impact on language learners.

The previous studies found that there is a significant improvement in students' speaking skills after being taught with visual aids (Nawir et al., 2022). Additionally, the use of visual aids can lower students' anxiety levels, contributing to an overall better performance in speaking assessments (Salamea-Avila & Fajardo-Dack, 2023). Other results also indicated that classes that effectively utilized visual aids make students more focused, better understand the material, and were more active in participation, while classes without visual aids tend to be monotonous and less engaging for students (Ilomo et al., 2021).

METHOD

This study employs Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model. The research involved 32 seventh-grade students at a junior high school in Belopa, South Sulawesi, as well as an English teacher who acted as a collaborator. In addition, an English teacher acts as a classroom observer as well as a reflective partner during the research process. Specifically, the collaborating teacher is responsible for: (1) systematically observing each learning session using structured observation sheets to document

students' speaking behaviors, participation patterns, and students' responses to the use of visual aids; (2) providing critical feedback and pedagogical suggestions during reflection sessions at the end of each cycle; and (3) collaboratively evaluating the effectiveness of learning actions with the researcher as a basis for planning the next cycle. The study was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of three meetings encompassing the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through tests (pre-test and post-test) to measure the improvement of students' speaking skills, classroom observations to examine the learning process, and interviews with teachers and students to obtain supporting data regarding their responses and perceptions toward the use of visual aids.

RESULTS

The results presented in this section reflect the development of students' speaking skills from before to after the actions were taken, as well as the effectiveness of visual aids in enhancing student participation and understanding during the learning process. A summary of the improvements is presented in the table below.

Table 1. The Summary of Improvements in Cycle I and Cycle II

No.	Identification of the Problems	Improvements in Cycle 1	Improvements in Cycle 2
1	Students have limited vocabulary that hinders their speaking fluency.	Students are beginning to recognize and use more vocabulary related to places and directions within the context of school.	Vocabulary mastery is improving and is being used more accurately during simulation activities and games.
2	Students lack confidence when speaking in front of the class.	Some students are starting to attempt to speak, although they are still hesitant and stuttering.	There is an observable increase in their self-confidence, and they are more willing to speak in both group settings and individually.
3	The fear of making mistakes makes students	The use of visual aids help to reduce anxiety; however,	Students feel more relaxed and are bolder in speaking because the learning

	reluctant to speak.	some students still exhibit hesitation.	context is made engaging and non-threatening.
4	Student participation is low because the material is not engaging and too abstract.	Visual aids such as images and maps enhance students' interest and involvement in learning.	Activities like Treasure Hunt encourage active participation as students find learning enjoyable.
5	The visual aids used has not yet been optimal in supporting speaking skills.	The use of visual aids is now directed to support pronunciation and contextual understanding.	Visual aids are used more diversely and directly linked to students' speaking practice in real activities.

The table above indicates that the use of visual aids significantly contributes to the improvement of students' speaking skills. In Cycle I, students began to show signs of improvement, particularly in vocabulary recognition, participation in classroom activities, and the courage to speak despite still being hesitant. The teacher also started to implement media in a more structured manner using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. However, in Cycle I, several challenges were still identified, such as time constraints in delivering the material, a lack of initial interaction between the teacher and students, and some students who had not yet demonstrated active participation. Based on these reflections, the actions in Cycle II were designed to accommodate the needs of the students better and maximize the use of visual aids.

In cycle II, the improvement was more significant. Students appeared more confident while speaking, able to use vocabulary and expressions more accurately, and showed high enthusiasm in activities such as role-play and treasure hunts. Teachers also appeared more confident in designing and facilitating learning that effectively utilized visual aids. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of visual aids in speaking lessons not only enhances students' linguistic abilities but also positively impacts their motivation and engagement in the learning process.

a. Cycle I

In the first cycle, the learning was focused on introducing vocabulary and phrases related to "Asking for and Giving Directions" with the assistance of

visual aids such as simple school maps and PowerPoint presentations. Students began to show enthusiasm for participating in the learning process, particularly when engaged in visual activities such as role-play and the "Find the Place" activity. However, several challenges were still identified, such as time constraints in delivering the material, as students required more time to comprehend the vocabulary and instructions. Additionally, there were still students who were hesitant to speak or uncertain when constructing sentences. The interaction between the researcher and the students was also not maximized at this stage.

In general, the results of actions in Cycle I indicate an initial positive development, although they have not yet achieved optimal outcomes. Reflecting on this cycle emphasizes the need for strategy adjustments, improvements in time management, and the delivery of more structured and gradual instructions. Therefore, actions are continued into Cycle II to optimize learning outcomes.

b. Cycle II

The second cycle was designed to address the shortcomings of the previous cycle. In this cycle, visual aids were utilized in a more varied and contextual manner, such as the use of printed maps, more engaging activity sheets, and real-life simulation activities like Treasure Hunt. These activities enable students to be more active and confident in speaking. Students showed significant improvement in aspects of pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary usage. Student participation had also increased, with some previously passive students beginning to speak up both in groups and individually. Teachers also appeared more confident in facilitating learning that employed visual aids.

Reflection on Cycle II indicates that the actions implemented have been effective and aligned with the research objectives. The majority of students demonstrated significant improvements, both individually and in groups, particularly in terms of participation, vocabulary mastery, and confidence in speaking. Therefore, this cycle is considered the final stage of the research implementation.

c. Students' Speaking Score

To measure the level of improvement in students' speaking skills following the intervention, the researcher conducted speaking tests in three

stages: before the intervention (pre-test), after Cycle I (post-test I), and after Cycle II (post-test II). The tests assessed five components of speaking skills, namely pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary mastery, grammatical accuracy, and speech comprehensibility. The scores for each aspect were then averaged to evaluate the overall development of the students.

Table 2. The Mean Score of Pre-test

	Pronunciation	Fluency	Vocabulary	Grammar	Comprehensibility
Mean	1.97	1.97	1.97	1.97	1.97
Std. Deviation	.309	.309	.309	.309	.309

The pre-test was conducted before the learning activities were provided, to measure students' initial ability to speak English. The average results indicate that students' abilities, in general, remain low. All aspects have the same average score of 1.97, with a standard deviation of 0.309. These scores suggest that students faced limitations in pronunciation, fluency, and constructing grammatically correct sentences. Many students still hesitated to speak and struggled to select the appropriate vocabulary, particularly when asked to provide directions in English.

Table 3. The Mean Score of Post-test in Cycle I

	Pronunciation	Fluency	Vocabulary	Grammar	Comprehensibility
Mean	2.94	2.66	3.03	2.53	2.69
Std. Deviation	.354	.545	.177	.507	.535

After the intervention in the first cycle, there was an increase in the average score for each speaking aspect. For instance, vocabulary improved to 3.03, pronunciation to 2.94, and fluency to 2.66. This improvement suggests that the use of visual aids is starting to impact students' confidence in speaking positively. Students are beginning to recognize more vocabulary, and their pronunciation is improving, although they still require guidance, particularly in pronouncing difficult words and constructing sentences.

Table 4. The Mean Score of Post-test in Cycle II

	Pronunciati on	Fluency	Vocabul ary	Grammar	Comprehe nsibility
Mean	4.00	3.69	4.22	3.56	3.87
Std. Deviation	.254	.535	.420	.504	.421

In the post-test of Cycle II, which also serves as the final cycle, the students' average scores demonstrated a significant improvement. Pronunciation reached an average score of 4.00, fluency 3.69, vocabulary 4.22, grammar 3.56, and comprehensibility 3.87. This improvement reflects the success of the implemented actions, particularly in terms of vocabulary comprehension, speaking fluency, and clarity in providing instructions or directions in English. The use of visual aids in a more contextual and varied manner greatly assisted students in learning more concretely and enjoyably.

Overall, the graph depicting the increase in scores from the pre-test to the post-test in Cycle II shows that the use of visual aids in speaking lessons plays an important role in enhancing students' abilities, particularly in mastery of the material, increased engagement, and confidence in speaking English.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate whether the use of visual aids can enhance the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at a Junior High School in Belopa, South Sulawesi. This objective was successfully achieved, as demonstrated by the progressive improvement in students' speaking scores across all assessment components — pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehensibility. Specifically, The overall average score increased from 2.94 at the pre-test stage to 3.45 following Cycle I and further rose to 4.04 at the conclusion of Cycle II. These results indicate a cumulative improvement of approximately 37.4% compared to the initial condition. The pattern of improvement suggests that the learning intervention is not only effective but also sustainable in each cycle.

These findings can be explained through various theoretical studies that consistently emphasize the cognitive and affective benefits of visual-based learning in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Jamilah et al. (2024) assert that visual elements function as instructional tools capable of

conveying meaning both informatively and illustratively, thereby helping to reduce students' cognitive load and allowing them to focus their mental resources on oral production. In line with this perspective, Pateşan et al. (2018) explain that visual aid makes learning more engaging, easier to understand, and more memorable because the combination of visual and verbal input reinforces the memory encoding process and long-term retention of language forms. The ease of accessing and recalling the language contributes to improvements in students' fluency and accuracy in speaking. This is reflected in the increase in the average vocabulary score from 3.03 in Cycle I to 4.22 in Cycle II in this study.

In the context of EFL classes, Nawir et al. (2022) also found that visual aid provides a significant improvement in students' speaking performance. In line with these findings, the integration of visual aids in learning at the secondary education level is considered capable of helping to enhance speaking fluency, accuracy in language use, pronunciation, as well as students' confidence in oral communication. Overall, these various studies and perspectives lead to the same conclusion that visual aids not only functions as a supplement to speaking instruction, but also plays a role in creating a learning environment that can reduce affective barriers, enhance cognitive processing, and support more meaningful oral interaction.

CONCLUSION

In line with these findings, the integration of multimedia in learning at the secondary education level is considered to help improve fluency in speaking, accuracy in language use, pronunciation, as well as students' confidence in oral communication. Overall, these various studies and perspectives lead to the same conclusion that visual aids not only function as a supplement to speaking instruction but also play a role in creating a learning environment that can reduce affective barriers, enhance cognitive processing, and support more meaningful oral interaction.

In addition to the improvement in quantitative scores, qualitative data obtained through classroom observations and interviews indicate that the use of visual aids also reduces students' anxiety when speaking, increases active participation, and encourages students' willingness to communicate. These factors play an important role in the development of EFL learners'

communicative competence.

The findings of this study align with various empirical studies indicating that visual-based learning strategies, including picture descriptions, illustrated stories, and multimedia integration, can enhance the speaking performance of EFL students at the junior high school level in Indonesia. The alignment between quantitative improvements and behavioral changes in students observed in this study strengthens the conclusion that visual aids not only function as learning tools but also serve as means capable of creating a more cognitively, affectively, and communicatively supportive learning environment. Therefore, English teachers at the Junior High School level are advised to creatively and contextually integrate various forms of visual aids into speaking instruction to foster a more effective, engaging, and student-centered learning process.

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