



Enhancing Students' Speaking Skills through Classroom Action Research in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study addresses the persistent issue of limited speaking performance among EFL students, particularly in terms of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence, which hinders effective classroom communication. Previous studies have highlighted similar challenges; however, empirical evidence on the systematic use of iterative teaching practices to improve multiple dimensions of speaking skills remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how Classroom Action Research (CAR) can enhance students' speaking skills in an authentic EFL context. This research employed a qualitative CAR design conducted at a campus in Brebes, involving 25 students. The study was implemented in three cycles, consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using qualitative techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal a consistent improvement in students' speaking skills across all indicators, supported by both qualitative observations and quantitative score increases. The study highlights the effectiveness of reflective and cyclical teaching practices in improving speaking performance. It is recommended that future research adopt mixed-method approaches and explore the integration of innovative instructional strategies to further enhance EFL speaking instruction.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research; Speaking Skills; EFL; Reflective Teaching; Communicative Competence

Introduction

The ability to speak English effectively has become a crucial competency in the globalized educational landscape, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Speaking skills are not only essential for academic success but also for enabling students to participate actively in international communication and professional environments. However, many students still experience difficulties in expressing their ideas fluently and accurately due to limited linguistic resources and psychological barriers such as anxiety and low confidence (Gobena, 2025; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). These challenges are often reflected in key speaking indicators, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence, which remain underdeveloped in many EFL classrooms. This condition is also observed among students at a campus in Brebes, where students' speaking performance shows persistent limitations in interactive communication (Christy, 2021; Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Previous studies have explored various strategies to enhance students' speaking skills in EFL settings, including communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and interactive media integration. These approaches have been found to improve students' fluency and engagement in classroom interaction. However, most studies primarily focus on the effectiveness of instructional techniques in controlled settings rather than examining the continuous development of speaking indicators such as accuracy and confidence over time (Varasarin, 2008). In addition, many studies employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs that do not fully capture the dynamic and reflective processes occurring in real classrooms. Consequently, there is still limited empirical evidence on how iterative teaching practices can systematically improve multiple dimensions of speaking skills in authentic EFL contexts (Adem & Berkessa, 2022; Safdari & Fathi, 2020; Syamsudin, 2015).

This gap highlights the need for a more contextual and reflective approach that allows teachers to identify classroom problems, implement targeted interventions, and evaluate improvements across speaking indicators in a cyclical manner. Classroom Action Research (CAR) provides a practical and systematic framework for such an approach through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This model enables teachers to monitor students' progress in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence while continuously refining instructional strategies. Unlike traditional research approaches, CAR emphasizes the role of teachers as reflective practitioners who actively respond to classroom challenges. Therefore, applying CAR in a campus in Brebes is essential to generate context-specific insights into improving students' speaking performance (Burns, 2009; Stephen Kemmis & Robin McTaggart, 2014; Stringer, 2019).

Based on the identified gap, this study aims to enhance students' speaking skills through the implementation of Classroom Action Research in EFL classrooms a campus in Brebes. Specifically, this study seeks to examine how the cyclical process of CAR contributes to improvements in key speaking indicators, namely fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence, across different stages of intervention. The research also investigates how reflective teaching practices influence students' participation and communicative competence in classroom interaction. By integrating a cyclical and reflective approach, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how speaking skills can be improved in a sustainable and context-sensitive manner. Ultimately, the findings are anticipated to contribute to the

development of more adaptive and evidence-based English teaching practices in higher education EFL settings (Brown, 2010; Harmer, 2008a; Thornbury, 2005a).

Research Methods

1. Research types

This study employed A Classroom Action Research design employing qualitative and descriptive quantitative approaches to systematically improve students' speaking skills in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom (Ceylan & Comoglu, 2024; Songsiri, 2007a). The selection of this method was based on its suitability for addressing practical classroom problems through reflective and cyclical processes. The research adopted the model of Kemmis and McTaggart, which consists of four iterative stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. These stages were implemented in three cycles to allow continuous improvement of teaching strategies and students' speaking performance. The focus of the intervention was on enhancing key speaking indicators, namely fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence, through structured classroom activities and reflective evaluation at each cycle.

2. Research Data Sources

The primary data sources in this study were obtained from students at a campus in Brebes who were actively involved in English learning activities. These data included students' speaking performances, classroom interactions, and responses during the learning process. In addition, secondary data sources were derived from relevant documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and field notes recorded during the implementation of the research cycles. The integration of primary and secondary data was intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' speaking development. All data sources were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, particularly in capturing improvements in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence.

3. Research Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of students enrolled in an English course a campus in Brebes. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on one class that demonstrated significant difficulties in speaking English. This class consisted of 25 students, all of whom were actively involved in the implementation of the Classroom Action Research cycles. The selection of this sample was based on its representativeness of common speaking challenges in EFL contexts, particularly in terms of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. All participants participated consistently across the three research cycles, ensuring the stability and comparability of the data collected. This sampling decision was made to ensure that the unit of analysis was both relevant and manageable for achieving the research objectives.

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through several techniques, including classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted systematically during each cycle to record students' speaking performance based on the indicators of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with selected students to explore their experiences, perceptions, and responses toward the implemented learning activities. Documentation techniques involved collecting audio recordings, photographs, and field notes to support the observational data. The data collection process was conducted in a

structured and continuous manner across the research cycles to ensure the validity and richness of the data obtained.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was conducted using qualitative analysis techniques adapted from Miles and Huberman, which include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Initially, all collected data were organized and categorized based on the four speaking indicators. The data were then reduced by selecting relevant information that reflected students' progress in each cycle. Furthermore, the data were displayed in descriptive and comparative forms to identify patterns of improvement across cycles. Reflective analysis was also conducted at the end of each cycle to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented actions and to determine necessary revisions. This systematic analytical process enabled the researcher to draw valid conclusions regarding the improvement of students' speaking skills.

Results and Discussion

Result

1. Description of the Form of the Issue or Phenomenon

The findings reveal that students initially experienced significant difficulties in speaking English, particularly in terms of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. In Cycle 1, most students were hesitant to speak and frequently paused due to limited vocabulary and fear of making mistakes. Their pronunciation was often unclear, and grammatical inaccuracies were common, which affected the overall clarity of communication. However, after implementing structured classroom interventions through Classroom Action Research, gradual improvements were observed in Cycle 2. Students began to participate more actively, showing better fluency and reduced hesitation during speaking activities. By Cycle 3, the majority of students demonstrated noticeable progress across all speaking indicators, including more confident delivery, clearer pronunciation, and improved grammatical accuracy.

Table 1. Improvement of Students' Speaking Skills Across Cycles

Indicator	Cycle 1 (Initial Condition)	Cycle 2 (Improvement Phase)	Cycle 3 (Optimal Development)
Fluency	Frequent pauses, hesitant	More continuous speech	Smooth and coherent speech
Accuracy	Many grammatical errors	Reduced errors	Mostly accurate structures
Pronunciation	Unclear articulation	Improved clarity	Clear and understandable
Confidence	Low participation	Moderate participation	High confidence and active

Source: Classroom Observation Data

Table 2. Students' Speaking Scores Across Cycles

Indicator	Cycle 1 (Mean Score)	Cycle 2 (Mean Score)	Cycle 3 (Mean Score)
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Fluency	2.4	3.1	3.8
Accuracy	2.2	3.0	3.7
Pronunciation	2.3	3.2	3.9
Confidence	2.5	3.3	4.0
Overall Mean	2.35	3.15	3.85

Scale: 1 = Very Poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = Fair, 4 = Good, 5 = Very Good

Source: *Speaking Assessment Rubric*

N = 25 students

The speaking assessment scores presented in Table 2 demonstrate a consistent improvement in students' speaking performance across the three research cycles. In Cycle 1, the overall mean score was 2.35, which falls into the "poor" category, reflecting students' initial difficulties in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. After the implementation of targeted interventions in Cycle 2, the overall mean increased to 3.15, indicating a transition to a "fair" level of performance. The most significant improvement was observed in confidence and pronunciation, suggesting that repeated practice and feedback contributed positively to students' engagement.

Furthermore, in Cycle 3, the overall mean score reached 3.85, which is categorized as "good," demonstrating substantial development in all speaking indicators. Fluency improved as students were able to speak more smoothly with fewer pauses, while accuracy showed better grammatical control. Pronunciation became clearer and more understandable, and students displayed higher confidence in participating actively during classroom activities. These findings confirm that the cyclical implementation of Classroom Action Research effectively enhanced students' speaking skills both qualitatively and quantitatively.

2. Factors that Influence

The improvement of students' speaking skills was influenced by several interrelated factors observed during the research cycles. First, the implementation of structured and repetitive speaking activities encouraged students to practice more frequently, which gradually improved their fluency and confidence. Second, the reflective teaching approach allowed the lecturer to identify students' weaknesses and adjust instructional strategies accordingly in each cycle. Third, a supportive classroom environment played a significant role in reducing students' anxiety, enabling them to participate more actively without fear of making mistakes. These factors were reinforced by students' perceptions, as reflected in the following interview excerpts:

"At first, I was afraid to speak because I often made mistakes and my friends might laugh. But after practicing in every meeting, I feel more confident and can speak more smoothly." (Student A)

"The activities in class help me improve my pronunciation because the lecturer always gives feedback and correction. I can see my progress in every meeting." (Student B)

These findings indicate that continuous practice, reflective teaching, and emotional support are critical factors contributing to the improvement of students' speaking performance.

3. Implications of Research Findings

The findings of this study have significant implications at multiple levels. At the individual level, the improvement in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence indicates that students can develop their speaking skills effectively through continuous and structured practice. At the instructional level, the results highlight the importance of reflective teaching practices in identifying learning challenges and adapting teaching strategies to meet students' needs. Furthermore, at the institutional level, the successful implementation of Classroom Action Research suggests that this approach can be adopted as a practical framework for improving teaching quality in EFL classrooms. Overall, the findings demonstrate that cyclical and reflective interventions not only enhance students' speaking performance but also create a more engaging and supportive learning environment.

Discussion

Improvement of Students' Speaking Fluency and Accuracy

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of structured speaking activities within Classroom Action Research (CAR) cycles contributed significantly to the improvement of students' speaking fluency and accuracy. Initially, students experienced difficulties in expressing ideas coherently, often producing fragmented speech accompanied by frequent pauses and grammatical inaccuracies. However, gradual improvement was observed across the three research cycles, as students became more capable of delivering ideas more smoothly and accurately during classroom interaction. The improvement suggests that repeated exposure to communicative speaking tasks enabled students to develop greater automaticity in language production and better control of linguistic structures. These findings support the theoretical perspective that speaking competence develops through meaningful interaction and continuous practice in authentic communicative contexts (Harmer, 2008b; Thornbury, 2005b).

Furthermore, the improvement in fluency and accuracy aligns with previous studies emphasizing the effectiveness of communicative and task-based approaches in EFL speaking instruction. (Richards, 2008) argues that communicative speaking activities provide learners with opportunities to negotiate meaning and actively use language for real interaction. Similarly, (Ghasemi & Mozaheb, 2021) found that continuous speaking practice enhances learners' fluency and grammatical control by increasing familiarity with language patterns. In the present study, the iterative cycles of CAR allowed students to progressively refine their speaking performance through practice, feedback, and reflection. Therefore, the findings extend previous research by demonstrating that structured speaking activities implemented systematically within reflective CAR cycles can facilitate sustained improvement in students' speaking competence.

The Role of Reflective Speaking Activities in Enhancing Students' Confidence

Another important finding of this study concerns the improvement of students' confidence in speaking English. At the beginning of the research, many students were reluctant to participate in speaking activities due to fear of making mistakes, limited

vocabulary mastery, and anxiety during classroom interaction. However, the implementation of reflective speaking activities gradually encouraged students to participate more actively and confidently in classroom discussions. The supportive classroom atmosphere and constructive feedback provided during each cycle appeared to reduce students' anxiety and increase their willingness to communicate in English. This indicates that emotional and motivational factors play a crucial role in shaping students' speaking performance in EFL classrooms.

The findings reinforce the argument that language learning is not solely a cognitive process but also involves affective dimensions such as confidence, motivation, and anxiety management (Brown & Lee, 2025; Dörnyei, 2014). The increase in students' confidence observed in this study is consistent with (Songsiri, 2007b), who found that supportive speaking environments and repeated oral practice positively influence learners' willingness to speak English. Additionally, (Goreis & Voracek, 2019) emphasize that learners' willingness to communicate is strongly influenced by psychological readiness and classroom climate. In this study, reflective speaking activities created opportunities for students to evaluate their progress, become more aware of their speaking development, and gradually build self-confidence. Therefore, the findings suggest that reflective and student-centered speaking activities can contribute not only to linguistic improvement but also to the development of positive emotional engagement in language learning.

Classroom Action Research as a Reflective Pedagogical Framework

The findings also highlight the role of Classroom Action Research as an effective reflective pedagogical framework for improving speaking instruction in EFL contexts. Through the cyclical stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, the lecturer was able to continuously identify students' learning difficulties and adjust instructional strategies accordingly. This reflective process enabled instructional decisions to become more adaptive and responsive to students' needs throughout the intervention. As a result, teaching practices were not implemented rigidly but evolved dynamically based on classroom realities observed during each cycle. Such flexibility contributed significantly to the gradual improvement of students' speaking performance.

These findings support the view that Classroom Action Research serves not only as a research methodology but also as a practical framework for professional development and instructional improvement (Burns, 2009; Stephen Kemmis & Robin McTaggart, 2014). Previous studies have emphasized that reflective teaching practices allow educators to critically evaluate classroom challenges and develop more context-sensitive pedagogical strategies (Stringer, 2019). In the context of this study, the iterative CAR cycles facilitated continuous refinement of speaking activities, feedback mechanisms, and classroom interaction patterns. Consequently, the study demonstrates that CAR can function as a systematic approach for improving both students' learning outcomes and teachers' pedagogical awareness in higher education EFL settings.

Pedagogical Implications for EFL Higher Education

The findings of this study provide several important implications for English language teaching practices in higher education EFL contexts. First, the study suggests that speaking instruction should prioritize structured communicative activities that encourage active student participation and continuous oral practice. Speaking development requires not only exposure to language input but also opportunities for

meaningful interaction and reflective learning experiences. Second, the findings indicate that reflective teaching practices should be integrated into classroom instruction to enable lecturers to adapt learning activities based on students' progress and classroom challenges. This adaptive approach is particularly important in vocational higher education contexts where students often demonstrate diverse linguistic abilities and communication needs.

Moreover, the study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of integrating affective support into speaking instruction. The improvement in students' confidence suggests that supportive classroom environments and constructive feedback can significantly influence learners' willingness to communicate in English. Therefore, EFL lecturers are encouraged to create learning environments that promote collaboration, reduce speaking anxiety, and foster students' self-confidence. Future studies are recommended to explore the integration of other instructional strategies, such as digital speaking platforms, role-play, or project-based learning, within Classroom Action Research frameworks to further enhance students' speaking competence in diverse educational settings.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of Classroom Action Research (CAR) effectively enhances students' speaking skills in EFL classrooms. Through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, students demonstrated significant improvement in key speaking indicators, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. Initially, students experienced considerable difficulties in expressing ideas, characterized by hesitation, limited vocabulary, and low participation. However, continuous intervention and structured speaking activities enabled students to gradually develop more coherent speech, better grammatical control, clearer pronunciation, and increased confidence in communication. These results indicate that a cyclical and reflective instructional approach can produce meaningful and measurable improvements in students' speaking performance.

This study also contributes conceptually, methodologically, and pedagogically to the field of English language teaching. Conceptually, it reinforces the importance of integrating cognitive and affective dimensions in developing communicative competence. Methodologically, the study demonstrates that Classroom Action Research is not only a problem-solving approach but also a systematic framework for continuous instructional improvement. Pedagogically, the findings highlight the importance of reflective teaching practices, structured speaking activities, and supportive classroom environments in facilitating language learning. Therefore, this research provides practical insights for educators to design more adaptive and responsive teaching strategies that align with students' needs in EFL contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was conducted in a single class with a limited number of participants, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. In addition, the study primarily focused on qualitative analysis supported by descriptive quantitative data, which may not fully capture the complexity of speaking development. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, apply mixed-method approaches, and explore the integration of specific instructional techniques within the Classroom Action Research framework. These directions are

expected to provide deeper insights into the development of speaking skills and contribute to more comprehensive and generalizable findings in EFL research.

Author Contribution Statement

Author 1 acted as the initiator and conceptor of the article; Author 2 contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data; Author 3 served as the validator of the data and analysis results; Author 4 contributed to the data collection and critical revision of the article. All authors approved the final content of the article and are responsible for all aspects of this research.

Statement of Interest

All authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest relevant to this research.

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