

STUDENTS' RESPONSES TOWARD THE USE OF INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE TECHNIQUES IN SPEAKING CLASS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores students' responses to the use of interactive dialogue techniques in speaking classes at MTs Muhammadiyah 20 Medan. The research involved 20 eighth-grade students (aged 13–15) selected through purposive sampling based on their active participation in speaking activities. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, with data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, supported by triangulation and member checking. The findings revealed four key themes: increased confidence, improved fluency, higher classroom engagement, and encountered challenges. Students reported feeling more confident when engaging in role-plays and dialogues, supported by a safe and collaborative environment. The average number of speaking turns rose from 2–3 to 6–8 per session, with more varied vocabulary use and improved grammatical accuracy. In terms of student engagement, 85% of participants described the activities as either "very enjoyable" (40%) or "enjoyable" (45%). However, some students faced difficulties with vocabulary and spontaneous speaking, suggesting the importance of scaffolding strategies such as pre-task vocabulary lists and sentence starters. The results align with Sociocultural Theory and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, highlighting the value of interaction, reduced anxiety, and peer support in language development. Although the study is limited to a small sample and a single school, it offers valuable insights into how interactive dialogue can enhance speaking skills when paired with appropriate instructional support.

Keywords: *Interactive Dialogue Techniques, Speaking skills*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a vital component of English language learning, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills for students to master. Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires learners to process language in real time, organizing ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary,

and delivering grammatically accurate and intelligible utterances on the spot. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that speaking involves both mental formulation and physical articulation of meaningful language, making it an integrative and demanding skill essential for effective communication.

In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings, speaking classes aim to develop learners' fluency, accuracy, and confidence. However, teaching practices often fall short in supporting these goals. Many classrooms still rely on teacher-centered approaches such as memorization and drilling, which provide limited opportunities for meaningful interaction. As a result, students tend to become passive participants, speaking only when prompted and often producing short, rehearsed responses. This lack of engagement is further compounded by anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary—factors that Ur (2012) identified as common barriers to student participation in speaking activities.

To address these issues, there is a growing need for more interactive and learner-centered strategies. One promising approach is the use of interactive dialogue techniques, which emphasize real-time communication and peer collaboration. Unlike traditional methods, these techniques foster purposeful conversation through role-plays, pair work, situational dialogues, and question-answer exchanges. Such practices are grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which views interaction as both the method and objective of language learning.

The theoretical support for interactive dialogue draws from Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky, as interpreted by Lantolf (2006). Through interaction with peers, students receive scaffolding that helps them move from assisted to independent speaking performance. Additionally, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis highlights the importance of lowering learners' anxiety and boosting motivation, outcomes that interactive dialogue activities are well-positioned to achieve.

Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of interactive and dialogue-based techniques in improving speaking skills within EFL contexts. For instance, Sari (2021)

examined the use of dialogue techniques in senior high school students and found significant gains in students' fluency and pronunciation accuracy after implementation. Similarly, Putri and Wahyuni (2020) found that role-play activities led to higher classroom participation and greater confidence among junior high school learners. Rahmawati (2019) also explored guided dialogue in speaking instruction and noted that students became more willing to initiate and maintain conversations in English. Beyond local contexts, Ali and Salih (2020) studied Iraqi EFL learners and discovered that communicative activities like pair dialogue and simulated interviews increased students' spontaneous language use and lowered their anxiety levels. Meanwhile, Chou (2018) emphasized the importance of student perceptions, arguing that learners who viewed speaking activities as enjoyable and relevant were more likely to engage actively and show progress. However, these studies primarily focused on the effectiveness of techniques in raising test scores or improving language features like fluency and pronunciation. Few have explored students' emotional and cognitive responses, such as whether they feel motivated, supported, or challenged by the activities used.

The present study differs by focusing not only on the performance outcome but more specifically on students' responses toward the use of interactive dialogue techniques. Understanding students' responses can offer deeper insights into their attitudes, preferences, challenges, and levels of engagement, which are crucial for designing more effective speaking classes.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating students' responses to interactive dialogue techniques in speaking classes. By examining learners' experiences and perceptions, the study provides deeper insights into how such methods impact student engagement, confidence, and communicative competence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore students' responses toward the use of interactive dialogue techniques in speaking classes. The participants consisted of 20 students from Grade VIII at MTs Muhammadiyah 15 Medan, who had been actively involved in speaking activities using interactive dialogue techniques over one

academic semester, selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in speaking activities and regular attendance. Participants' ages ranged from 13 to 15 years, with a fairly equal distribution of male and female students. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation of learning materials, including student outputs and teacher lesson plans. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure clarity, while observations focused on student engagement during role-plays, situational dialogues, and Q&A sessions.

The researcher acted as the primary instrument in both data collection and analysis, consistent with Creswell's (2012) view of the researcher's central role in qualitative inquiry. To minimize bias, the researcher maintained reflexive notes and consulted peers during the analysis process. The data were analyzed using Miles Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, informed consent was obtained from students and their guardians, and all data were anonymized to protect confidentiality. To ensure credibility, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing findings across interviews, observations, and documentation, and member checking was conducted to validate participant responses. This qualitative approach enabled a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, emotions, and challenges in learning to speak English through interactive dialogue techniques.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and documentation, students' responses toward the use of interactive dialogue techniques in the speaking class can be categorized into four main themes (1) increased confidence, (2) improved speaking fluency, (3) higher classroom engagement, and (4) encountered challenges. These themes emerged from recurring patterns in the qualitative data.

1. Increased Confidence

Most students reported feeling more confident when speaking English through dialogue-based activities. They highlighted that pair and group work created a safe environment, reduced their fear of making mistakes, and encouraged them to take risks.

“I used to be nervous speaking in English, but now I feel braver when talking to my friends through dialogue activities.” – (Student A)

This aligns with Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that anxiety can be lowered through engaging and comfortable activities, thereby facilitating better language acquisition.

2. Improved Speaking Fluency

Observational data showed that students were able to respond more quickly and naturally after several sessions using interactive dialogue. They also used more varied vocabulary and grammatical structures in context.

Indicator	Before Dialogue Technique	After Dialogue Technique
Average speaking turns per session	2–3 turns	6–8 turns
Use of varied vocabulary	Limited to basic expressions	Increased use of topic-based vocabulary
Grammatical accuracy	Frequent errors	Noticeable improvement

Table 1. Comparison of Students' Speaking Performance Before and After Dialogue Activities

3. Higher Classroom Engagement

Students expressed that the learning atmosphere became more enjoyable and participative. The use of role-play and guided dialogues motivated them to be more active in class discussions.

Response Category	Percentage of Students (%)
Very Enjoyable	40%
Enjoyable	45%
Neutral	10%
Less Enjoyable	5%

Figure 1. Student Feedback on the Use of Interactive Dialogue Techniques

The data above shows that 85% of students had a positive response toward the method, indicating strong engagement. This supports James P. Lantolf (2002) theory that language development occurs effectively through social interaction and collaboration. Students reported that the learning atmosphere became significantly more enjoyable and participative when interactive dialogue techniques such as role-play and guided dialogues were employed. These methods encouraged students to actively take part in class discussions rather than remaining passive listeners. According to the feedback data, 40% of students described the learning experience as *very enjoyable*, while an additional 45% found it *enjoyable*, making a total of 85% expressing positive engagement. Only a small portion of students (10%) felt neutral, and an even smaller group (5%) perceived the activities as less enjoyable.

This high level of positive response suggests that interactive dialogue techniques effectively motivate students to engage more deeply in the learning process. This outcome aligns with James P. Lantolf 's (2002) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that language

development is best facilitated through meaningful social interactions and collaborative learning. Vygotsky argued that learners construct knowledge within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by engaging with peers and more capable others in social contexts. Interactive dialogue, by encouraging communication and cooperation, creates an environment where students can scaffold each other's learning, practice new language skills in real-time, and build confidence through peer support.

Thus, the use of interactive dialogue techniques not only enhances enjoyment but also fosters a dynamic and socially rich classroom environment that is conducive to language acquisition and active participation.

4. Encountered Challenges

Despite the positive responses, several students reported difficulties such as limited vocabulary, difficulty in spontaneous speaking, and occasional misunderstandings with peers.

"Sometimes I don't know the words I want to say, so I pause a lot or ask my friend in Bahasa." – (Student D)

This challenge indicates a need for scaffolding strategies, such as providing vocabulary lists or language frames before the dialogue sessions. According to Harmer (2007), scaffolding can help learners become more independent and fluent in spoken language.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that interactive dialogue techniques have a generally positive impact on students' speaking development, particularly in terms of confidence, fluency, and engagement. These results resonate with previous studies, such as Putri and Sari (2019) and Wulandari (2020), yet the present research goes further by capturing students' subjective experiences and not merely performance outcomes. For example, students reported feeling more motivated and less anxious when engaging in role-plays and dialogues,

which supports Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. However, rather than simply confirming this theory, the data suggest that reduction in anxiety was situational—students felt more confident only when they were familiar with the topic or vocabulary. This nuance highlights the context-dependent nature of affective factors in language learning, which is often overlooked in broader theoretical discussions.

Increased speaking fluency was observed through more active participation and improved lexical range, aligning with Long's (2015) Interaction Hypothesis. Yet, the study found that fluency gains were uneven; students with higher initial proficiency benefited more, while lower-proficiency learners often hesitated or reverted to their first language. This raises questions about the assumption that interaction alone is sufficient for all learners and underscores the need for differentiated support.

Similarly, classroom engagement improved, echoing Ramadhani's (2018) research, and was reinforced by peer collaboration and real-life speaking contexts. However, engagement was not consistent across all students. Some remained quiet during group work, indicating that interactive techniques may not automatically ensure equitable participation. This calls for a critical reevaluation of how such techniques are implemented and monitored.

While previous literature has emphasized the importance of scaffolding (Harmer, 2007; Sari & Putra, 2021), this study revealed student-reported tensions between guided support and the pressure to perform spontaneously. For instance, one student commented, "Sometimes I don't know the words I want to say, so I pause a lot or ask my friend in Bahasa." This points to the cognitive strain of real-time speaking, especially in the absence of structured pre-task preparation. Although scaffolding strategies were acknowledged as helpful, their application varied, suggesting a need for more systematic integration of vocabulary support, sentence starters, and modeling into classroom routines.

Theoretically, this study supports Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), but it also questions its practical boundaries. While peer assistance was often beneficial, some students relied too heavily on stronger peers, leading to dependency rather than

autonomous speaking growth. This indicates a need for scaffold fading, a gradual withdrawal of support, to encourage independence.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the small sample size and single-school setting limit the generalizability of findings. Second, students' self-reports, while insightful, may be influenced by social desirability or limited language proficiency in articulating their perceptions.

Interactive dialogue techniques promote engagement and provide meaningful language practice, but they are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Their effectiveness depends heavily on learner readiness, classroom dynamics, and the quality of instructional scaffolding. Future research should explore how these techniques can be adapted to suit diverse learner needs, incorporate more robust feedback systems, and measure long-term speaking development. By moving beyond confirmation of established theories, this study contributes a more nuanced and learner-centered understanding of interactive speaking pedagogy.

Conclusion

Speaking remains a critical yet challenging skill in English language learning, especially in EFL contexts where opportunities for authentic interaction are limited. This study found that the use of interactive dialogue techniques such as role-plays, situational dialogues, and peer conversations positively influences students' confidence, fluency, and classroom engagement. Grounded in Sociocultural Theory and supported by student feedback, these techniques create a collaborative and low-anxiety learning environment conducive to language development. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary and difficulties with spontaneous expression highlight the importance of integrating structured scaffolding and feedback. Teachers should support students with pre-task vocabulary, sentence frames, and peer modeling to help them participate more confidently and effectively.

These findings suggest the need for curriculum designers and language instructors to adopt more student-centered speaking practices that balance interaction with guided support. At the policy level, teacher training programs should include practical modules on implementing interactive dialogue strategies and differentiating instruction based on learner needs. While the results offer valuable insights, they are context-specific to one school and a small group of learners. Future studies involving diverse educational settings and quantitative measures are recommended to examine broader applicability and long-term impact.

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