

Unveiling English Language Teaching Strategies and Assessment Practices Used by Teachers in Enhancing EFL Eighth-Grade Students' Speaking Skill

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Abstract

This study explores the English language teaching strategies and assessment practices used by EFL teachers to enhance the speaking skills of eighth-grade students. The study was conducted at SMP Maraqitta'limat Sapit and SMPN 2 Suela, two junior high schools in Suela District, East Lombok. A qualitative case study design was used, involving three English teachers as the main participants. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The findings show that the three teachers used a shared core of teaching strategies, namely dialogue practice, role play, discussion, and picture describing, delivered through a consistent model-practice-perform sequence. This sequence was found to be a deliberate response to students' shyness and fear of making mistakes. For assessment, the teachers relied mainly on performance-based practices connected directly to their teaching strategies, particularly role play and oral presentation, supported by ongoing observation, a rubric, and a final exam. However, the consistency of rubric use varied between teachers. The study concludes that teaching strategies and assessment practices in these classrooms are closely connected, and suggests that teachers keep this sequence while simplifying rubrics for more consistent use in fast-moving speaking lessons.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a productive skill that plays a central role in daily communication, as it is the main way people share and exchange information with one another [1]. Many EFL students still struggle to speak because they lack enough practice, and speaking requires enough vocabulary and grammar knowledge to produce sentences [2]. Teachers can help by using classroom strategies that create real opportunities for practice [3], [4], and by using assessment that is planned, criterion-based, and used consistently to track students' progress [5], [6]. Rusdin and Purwati [7] emphasize that assessing speaking is essential because it helps EFL teachers evaluate how well students can use speaking skills across different topics and contexts, and Jannah and Hartono [8] add that assessment can also help students take responsibility for their own learning progress. Preliminary observations at SMP Maraqitta'limat Sapit and SMPN 2 Suela found that speaking instruction relied heavily on printed dialogue texts and question-and-answer routines, with limited spontaneous speaking practice, and that a scoring rubric was available but rarely used consistently.

Previous studies have examined teaching strategies and assessment practices for speaking separately: Razi et al. [1] studied the strategies junior high school teachers use to teach speaking, while Fadila and Trisno [9] studied how teachers assess speaking performance. Similarly, Rusdin and Purwati [7] documented junior high school students' speaking problems without examining how teachers' instructional choices shaped the assessment that followed, and Jannah and Hartono [8] examined teachers' speaking assessment practices without connecting them back to the teaching strategies that preceded them. Across these studies, teaching strategies and assessment practices are consistently treated as separate areas of inquiry, even though Widiastuti [5] argues that assessment is only meaningful when it is planned and used consistently alongside instruction. Neither study explains how a teacher's choice of teaching strategy relates to the way that same teacher assesses speaking. This connection matters because a teaching strategy is more likely to support students' speaking development when the assessment tasks, rubrics, and feedback that follow it match the same goal. This study addresses this gap by exploring (1) what teaching strategies EFL teachers apply to enhance eighth-grade students' speaking skills, and (2) how EFL teachers implement assessment practices to enhance students' speaking skills.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative case study design, which allows an in-depth understanding of teaching strategies and assessment practices as they actually occur in the classroom [10], [11]. The research was conducted at SMP Mara qitta'limat Sapit and SMPN 2 Suela, two junior high schools in Suela District, East Lombok. The participants were three English teachers, two from SMP Mara qitta'limat Sapit and one from SMPN 2 Suela, selected through purposive sampling [12] based on the criteria that each teacher taught eighth-grade English in the 2025/2026 academic year and was responsible for teaching and assessing speaking.

Data were collected using three instruments: an observation checklist, a semi-structured interview guide, and a documentation sheet. Each teacher was observed once during a regular speaking lesson lasting two 40-minute periods (80 minutes in total), conducted in their own classroom as part of the school's ongoing semester schedule; Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 were observed at SMP Mara qitta'limat Sapit, and Teacher 3 was observed at SMPN 2 Suela. Each teacher was also interviewed once, in a face-to-face session lasting approximately 30–45 minutes conducted shortly after the observed lesson, and their related documents (assessment rubrics, student work samples, speaking materials, and photographs) were collected once. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [13], consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure credibility, the study used method triangulation [12], comparing findings from observation, interview, and documentation for each teacher.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Teaching Strategies Applied by the Teachers

Across all three teachers, dialogue practice, role play, discussion, and picture describing were the most frequently applied strategies, delivered through a consistent sequence: the teacher first modeled or introduced the material, then guided students through partner or group practice,

and only then asked them to perform with less support. This model-practice-perform pattern was confirmed independently through observation, interview, and documentation.

These strategies align with the three categories proposed by Nation and Newton [14]: meaning-focused input (storytelling, picture describing), language-focused guided practice (dialogue practice, vocabulary role-play, think-pair-share), and meaning-focused output (role play, discussion, language games). This is consistent with Herrell and Jordan's [4] view of strategies as tools for scaffolding oral language from teacher-supported to independent use.

This finding is broadly consistent with Razi et al. [1], who found role play, picture describing, language games, and storytelling used by junior high school teachers to teach speaking. However, drilling, reported by Razi et al. [1], did not appear as a distinct strategy here; instead, dialogue practice and read-pair-share served a similar function of controlled, repeated practice. Discussion was also more prominent in this study, suggesting a stronger emphasis on giving students room to exchange opinions rather than only rehearse fixed language.

The interviews suggest a reason for this pattern: all three teachers linked their choice of strategy to managing students' shyness and fear of mistakes. Teacher 1 explained that role play works because pairs "feel more relaxed and aren't too afraid of making mistakes," and Teacher 2 said students "practice with their friends first" because "some students are still shy." This suggests the model-practice-perform sequence is a deliberate response to students' reluctance to speak without first rehearsing, rather than a routine the teachers happened to fall into.

3.2 Assessment Practices Implemented by the Teachers

All three teachers assessed speaking mainly through performance-based practices connected directly to their teaching strategies, especially role play and oral presentation, combined with ongoing observation, a rubric, and a final exam. This is consistent with Brown and Abeywickrama [6], who argue that speaking assessment should be an ongoing process built into classroom activities and guided by clear, consistent criteria rather than treated as a separate testing event.

This finding both supports and extends Fadila and Trisno [9], who found junior high school teachers used intensive, responsive, and interactive speaking assessment but struggled with consistency in scoring. A comparable consistency gap appeared here: Teacher 2's five-aspect rubric was confirmed by observation and by her own account as not consistently used, while the three-aspect rubrics used by Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 were applied as designed. This suggests that a shorter rubric may be easier to apply consistently during a fast-moving speaking lesson than a longer, more detailed one.

Interview data suggest performance-based assessment is preferred because it is seen as more valid evidence of speaking ability than a single test score — as Teacher 1 put it, it lets her "see their actual speaking ability during the learning process, not only from the final result." Teacher 2's own explanation, that she "does not always use the rubric in every speaking activity" and instead relies on "observation and notes," points to a gap between assessment planning and classroom implementation, rather than a lack of awareness of the rubric's criteria.

3.3 Cross-Case Differences

Only Teacher 1 used peer assessment; this appears to reflect an individual preference rather than a difference between the two schools, since Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 teach at the same school and neither used it. Smaller differences also appeared in specific strategies used (e.g., think-pair-share only for Teacher 1; reporting back and read-pair-share only for Teacher 2 and Teacher 3), which likely reflect individual teaching style rather than institutional differences.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the three EFL teachers used a shared core of teaching strategies, namely dialogue practice, role play, discussion, and picture describing, delivered through a consistent model-practice-perform sequence aimed at building students' confidence before independent speaking. For assessment, the teachers relied mainly on performance-based practices connected directly to their teaching strategies, supported by ongoing observation, a rubric, and a final exam, though consistency of rubric use varied between teachers. Overall, teaching strategies and assessment practices in these classrooms were closely connected, with small differences between teachers reflecting individual style rather than differences between the two schools. Teachers are suggested to keep applying the model-practice-perform sequence and to consider simplifying rubrics for more consistent use during live speaking lessons.

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