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Promoting Students' English-Speaking Skills Using English Speaking Practice Application

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Abstract

Speaking is a practical skill and serves as a crucial indicator of one's proficiency in English. Generally, an individual is considered to have a strong command of the English language if they can effectively communicate verbally. Mastery of speaking skills is particularly challenging, as it necessitates consistent practice. To address the challenges faced by students in developing their English-speaking abilities, researchers implemented the English-Speaking Practice (ESP) application as a resource for facilitating English conversation. This study aimed to enhance students' speaking skills across various dimensions, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Employing a participatory action research methodology, data was gathered through observations, interviews, and assessments. The findings indicated that the ESP application, featuring a "Listen, Quiz, Practice, and Record" function, successfully improved speaking abilities, as evidenced by an increase in scores across four evaluated sections: 58.55, 64.73, 70.18, and 78.18, respectively. This study revealed that the integration of the ESP application significantly enhanced students' proficiency in English speaking.



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INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill is a difficult language skill to master. Speaking requires vocabulary, the ability to pronounce it, grammar, fluency, etc. This skill will not come to individual suddenly. It requires a lot of time to practice continuously. The more you practice speaking, the better your speaking skills will be.

We know that English, in Indonesia, is still as a foreign language. This can be seen from English which has not been used as a daily language or second language in communication. The fact shows that English is only as a complement in the learning process so that practically English has not been mastered by learners. Learning English in classroom is still dominated by the use of Indonesian. This becomes an obstacle for language learners to master English both oral and written. The students' opportunities that should use English in class are lost. Emphasising on learning English is more stressed on grammatical explanation.

One good way to learn to speak English as a foreign language is practising it with people who master the language, especially native speakers (native speakers from that country). (Wahyuni & Afianti, 2021) stated that native speaker (or competence use of the language) know how to say a word that is how to pronounce it. This knowledge is made up of three areas, namely sounds, stress and intonations." However, this is very unlikely because it is difficult to meet native speakers. If this can be done, it will cost a lot of money as we have to live in a country where English is practiced every day. Therefore, as a shortcut to learn English as foreign language, we need tools to achieve optimal results. One of the efforts that can be done is to access English learning such as using applications that suit their needs.

During a pandemic, online learning is the best solution to do. Students or lecturers can use technology according to their wishes. Lecturers, teachers or students do not need to come to school or campus as a place to study. They can follow the lessons at home. They don't need to pay travel expenses, avoid travel risks, and reduce travel time. However, from those advantages, in the notes and experiences of researchers that online learning still has weaknesses in its implementation. Some of the obstacles that arise are unstable internet networks, online learners who have not shown readiness in their learning, data packages that are not available or it requires no small amount of money to access the internet, inadequate tool specifications and so on. With these things, Individual presentations in online learning are difficult to do because there are limitations in the learning process, especially in learning speaking. Learning to speak English has not been achieved optimally. Besides that, the learning process is not optimal, especially to see and observe the behavior and development of student learning.

To support online learning, language teachers need to equip students to learn independently, which is known as self-access learning. Self access learning is an independent learning to provide facilities to students in developing skills. (Jamilah et al., 2019) stated, "Self-access learning materials are English teaching materials that are designed to be used for independent learning. They can learn independently without the help of a teacher or study partner." (Richards & Schmidt, 2018) said that the capacity of materials to be used independently by learners without the guidance or direction of a teacher. The English Speaking Practice application is one application that can help students improve speaking skills. These applications include listen (listening), quiz (practice in understanding the material), practice (train students in saying sentences in the form of dialogue), and record (record their own conversation with the help of the interlocutor in the application). "The emergence of mobile technologies and the rapid development of mobile applications created a new learning opportunity for EFL learners."

Based on the observation, the researcher found the students' weaknesses in speaking ability. These weaknesses included; 1) they spoke and read fluently but they were careless in pronouncing word, 2) they did not speak and read fluently, their pronunciation were almost not correct in pronouncing words, 3) they often ignored grammar in speaking, 4) they did not pay attention to intonation, 5) their ability to use vocabulary was not appropriate.

Based on the background and identification of problems in the field, the researcher sought to reduce these weaknesses and improve students' speaking skills using the English speaking practice application. Therefore, the researcher intended to improve students' speaking skills through English Speaking Practice application.

METHODS

The research design used in this research was classroom action research. The design has four cycles consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting which were explained as follows: a) Planning is preparation activity. In this step, the researcher explained what, why, when, where, by whom, and how the action was carried out. In this step the researcher prepared the important things that related to speaking skills namely English speaking Practice application, b) Acting is research action which apply the planning. Firstly, the researcher gave an explanation about how to speak, secondly the researcher downloaded the English speaking practice application, thirdly, the researcher guided students to do activity on the application in sequence, c) Observing is an observation activity carried out by the researcher during the learning process. Observation was made at the time of class action by recording symptoms that appear during the course of action. In

this step the researcher take an observer from the students when they are following the teaching learning process. In observation the researcher take the data using observation checklist, d) Reflecting is an activity to restate what has been done. In this stage, the teacher tries to find things that will be succesfull or unsuccessful. At the stage of reflection researchers also need to reveal the results of research by revealing their strengths and weaknesses.

The research was conducted at the students of Islamic state college of Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember. Data Collecting Techniques which used were observation, interview about the students speaking ability and their need, and test the speaking ability by using audio recording. The result of the test was analysed by using the formula as follows:

$$P = [S/N \times 100\%]$$

P: the total score obtained of each indicator

S: the number of the scores obtained of each indicator

N: the sum total of score

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are some steps to be done in this study. First, that lecturer gave example how to use the application to train the speaking skills. After giving the example, the lecturer asked the students to practice the application by themselves. The preparation of planning the researcher arranged the following steps; 1) the researcher made WA group, 2) he proposed the learning objectives, 3) he designed a speaking skill assessment, 4) he shared the link of application to be downloaded, 5) the researcher implemented the the application to the students, 6) he gave example the students to do the task, and 7) he asked the students to do the task privately.

To support the learning and teaching process, researchers made online classes via whatsapp groups. There were 10 students who were members of this class. The purpose of this online class was to communicate with each other between lecturers and students. Students submitted learning development assignments while the lecturer provided feedback on students' speaking development assignments. In addition, other student members saw the progress of their friends.

The learning objectives were that students were able to speak English fluently, to pronounce English vocabulary well, to use technology well, and to learn English independently. The main learning outcomes in this study were that the students were being able to speak English fluently. The product of learning with this application was in the form of digital audio or digital recordings in the form of conversational voices that were made automatically through the English Speaking

Practice application.

1) Speaking skill assessment.

In this study, researchers conducted a process assessment. This assessment was carried out to see the development and progress of students in speaking.

2) Link of application

This assessment applies an application called English Speaking Practice. To use this app, users have to download from play store. This application can be downloaded with a smart phone. The way to download is to write English Speaking Practice on the play store; it will automatically appear on the screen and be installed on the smart phone.

3) Implementation of the application

After the English Speaking Practice application was installed on each student's smart phone, the researcher implemented the material contained in the application to students. In the application there are two main categories namely Beginners Conversation and Business Conversation. Each of these categories has 10 topics and each topic consists of 20 conversations or dialogues.

4) The researchers gave example the students to do the task

To make it easier for students to learn to speak English, the researcher provides an explanation, an example of using the "English Speaking Practice" application. This is done so that students can use the application in groups or individually. Researchers expect students to have the will and ability to learn independently.

5) Students to do the task privately

In the learning process, it is important for lecturers to train students to learn independently to improve their abilities, responsibilities, and be able to use appropriate technology. Therefore in this study, lecturers as researchers asked students to practice this application independently. To monitor student performance, lecturers ask for student learning outcomes to be submitted via WhatsApp group. Besides lecturers being able to assess student work, members of the whatsapp group can also view and assess the work of other students.

Speaking Materials

In the learning process, it is important for lecturers to choose and determine learning materials. Learning material is material that is learned by students. Learning materials become one of the supporting implementation of the learning process. Besides that, as evidence of the existence of a learning process is due to the existence of learning materials. To support the implementation of the research, the researcher selects and determines speaking learning materials from the English Speaking Practice application. The researcher chose and determined 4 conversation materials which included: 1)

Implementasi English Speaking Practice Application

The implementation of the use of the English Speaking Practice (ESP) application is as follows; the first, the research created a whatapps group. The second, the researchers asked students to install the ESP application on each of their Androids. Third, students study the material in the application which ends with making a product in the form of an audio recording of the conversation. The fourth, students provide feedback on their own products and the products of their friends through the WhatsApp group. The fifth, the researcher provides evaluation and feedback on student products. The following is a model of implementation figure for using the English Speaking Practice application.

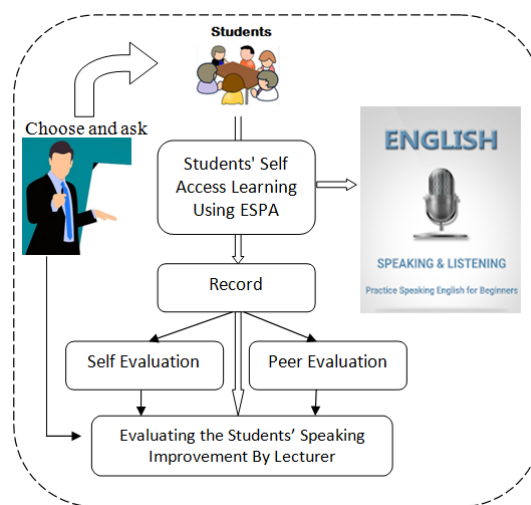


Figure 1. Model of Learning Using English Speaking Practice Application

Listen Activity

"Listen Activity" is the initial activity when the user implements this application. As the name implies, at this stage the user listens to a conversation between two people. This listening activity can be done many times according to the user's desire. But if the user wants to test his own listening skills, he can play and listen to the audio 1 or two times.

Quiz Activity

"Quiz" is the second activity after the user performs the "Listen" activity. In the "Quiz" activity, the user examines the questions provided by this application. "Quiz" consists of several questions related to conversations in "Listen". The questions in "Quiz" are in the form of multiple choices. As in the "Listen" activity, in the "Quiz" activity the user can practice doing it many times according to the user's wishes.

Practice Activity

In the "Practice" activity, the user practices the provided conversation as it is in the "Listen" activity. Each conversation on this application only involves two people. In this section the user can choose a partner. As an example is the conversation between James and Paul. If the user wants to practice James then the user chooses Paul as a partner. Conversely, if the user wants to practice Paul then he chooses James as a partner. In the "Practice" activity the user must pay attention to the length of time provided by this application. If the user is slow to practice their part, the partner will automatically respond to the user even though the user has not finished practicing their part. Conversely, when the user is too fast to practice his part, the partner will respond automatically according to the time. Therefore, users are required to be able to imitate their parts correctly.

Record Activity

The "Record" activity is the final activity of this application. The "Record" activity is the exact same activity as the "Practice" activity. After all aspects are mastered, the user presses the "Record" button as a sign that the user is recording conversation activity. After completion, the data can be stored in the form of audio. In this case the user can provide the name of the data according to the user's wishes.

The Result of the Implementation of English Speaking Practice Apps

The scores obtained by students in the text 1 conversation material can be seen on the following table 1;

Tabel 1. Category of the Students' Speaking Skills Score

No	Score	Category	Speaking Test Result							
			Text 1		Text 2		Text 3		Text 4	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	80-100	Very Good	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	54.5
2	70-79	Good	0	0	2	18.2	7	63.6	5	45.5
3	60-69	Enough	5	45.5	9	81.8	4	36.4	0	0
4	<60	Not Enough	6	54.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Number of Students			11	100	11	100	11	100	11	100

From table 1 regarding the score category of students' speaking skills in text 1 can be described as follows. The category "enough" with a score range of 60-69 was obtained by 5 students with a percentage of 45.5 and the category "not enough" with a score range less than 60 was obtained by 6 students with a percentage of 54.5. The score categories of students' speaking skills in text 2 can be described as follows. The "good" category with a score range of 70-79 was obtained by 2 students

with a percentage of 18.2 and the "enough" category with a score range of 60-69 was obtained by 9 students with a percentage of 91.8. The score categories of students' speaking skills in text 3 can be described as follows. The "good" category with a score range of 70-79 was obtained by 7 students with a percentage of 63.6 and the "enough" category with a score range of 60-69 was obtained by 4 students with a percentage of 36.4. The score categories of students' speaking skills in text 4 can be described as follows. The "very good" category with a score range of 80-100 was obtained by 6 students with a percentage of 54.5 and the "good" category with a score range of 70-79 was obtained by 5 students with a percentage of 45.5.

Discussion

The results of students' speaking skills using the English Speaking Practice application showed improvement. There was a difference in the average score for each text and each meeting is 58.55, 64.73, 70.18 and 78.18. It could be interpreted that the use of the English Speaking Practice application improved students' speaking skills. In particular, the five aspects of students' speaking ability in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension are progressing.

This is also supported by students 1 stated, "Before I used the application, when I found the conversation text, it's difficult to pronounce the right words I knew, but when I got to know the application, the difficulty was resolved and even provided other benefits such as I can practice conversation all the time, practice listening and increase my vocabulary. I think this application provides many benefits in learning English and it is easy to apply the application." In line with Almadhady, Salam, & Baharum (2021) stated that efficient use of technology is proven and considered a constructive learning environment and can enhance language learning. The use of applications is considered as advantageous apps in their educational tools. The use of artificial intelligence technologies in educational activities have a significant impact on the students' main competencies development (Wang, 2023). Watching English native speakers' youtube is effective way to improve the students' pronunciation ability (Hasanah & Wahono, 2022). Besides that, through this application, audio can be played repeatedly so that students' understanding of the material is better.

From the students' comment, she got new things about vocabularies she took and recalled the old one. As Jemes (1987, 3)) proposes two vocabularies: a receptive vocabulary and an expressive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary is the words we know when we listen or read, and when we receive thoughts from others. Whereas expressive vocabulary is the words we use when we speak or write, that is when we express thoughts to others.

Student 2 said, “before I use this application I don’t know how to pronounce a sentence well but after I use this application many benefits that I got from it like I know how to pronounce a sentence well especially abbreviation, how to make intonation and also I like the application because it is fun and the sound can be collaborated.” Nunan (1999, 106) suggests that pronunciation helps learners to identify the differences of meaning (based on stress, rhythm, and intonation) based on differences in individual sounds. Using technology in learning a second language has become a real necessity nowadays. Incorporating modern technology as a medium into the instruction process becomes necessary for effective learning and teaching of the speaking skill. The technology encourages students to develop their speaking skill so that the teaching process is much more interesting. Fun and enjoyable learning motivate and help the students to enhance their language learning in a fruitful way, moreover, these tools help students learn at their own pace and promote autonomy in them. Choosing audio that comes with a transcript so we can read along, listening to the audio of the native speaker, paying attention to how they say each of the words, repeating and comparing the recording ourselves are the way to improve pronunciation (Lewis, 2021). Another reason for the increasing ability of students is that this application also provides an attraction because students can search, find, and choose the themes they want. Thus students are free and really involved in the learning process. Involving students well in learning means that students do not get bored easily, they tend to be more active so that students' abilities increase (Wahono & Zahro, 2021).

From this discussion it can be stated that learning using the English Speaking practice application with systematic presentation steps through smart phone technology can make a positive contribution to the development and progress of students' abilities in mastering speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study it can be concluded as follows: 1) to improve your pronunciation skills with the English Speaking Practice application is to listen to the conversation carefully in the "Listen" section many times and practice it through the "Practice and Record" section, 2) to improve vocabulary and grammar skills students can practice by doing questions in the "Quiz" section, 3) to improve speaking fluency with the English Speaking Practice application, students can practice in the "Practice and Record" section, and 4) to improve comprehension with the English Speaking Practice application, students can practice by listening to conversations in the "Listen and Quiz" section. Therefore, it can be suggested for teachers, lecturers and students to use the English Speaking Practice

application or other similar applications in learning English, especially in speaking English skills.

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