Enhancing Confidence and Fluency through Project Based Learning for Basic Speaking Course

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Project-Based Learning can effectively improve students' confidence and speaking fluency in a Basic Speaking course. Speaking is often considered one of the most difficult language skills to master due to factors such as nervousness and limited speaking opportunities. Through the application of PBL, learners participate in purposeful, group-oriented activities that encourage the practical use of the target language in realistic situations. The subject of this study wa the second semester students of English Education Department, Nahdlatul Ulama Lampung University. This study was utilizing a Classroom Action Reseach method that includes problem identification, planning, action, observation and reflection. The data collecting used triangulation consist of test, observation and interviews. The study in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 reveals that Project Based Learning contributes to a positive and motivating learning atmosphere. It also enhances students' engagement and facilitates frequent opportunities for genuine interaction. Consequently, students exhibit significant enhancement in both their confidence and fluency in speaking. The findings suggest that PBL is an effective instructional approach for cultivating communicative abilities in beginning language learners.

Keywords: *Basic speaking; confidence; fluency; project based learning*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era marked by rapid advancement and global interconnectedness, mastering English as an international language is extremely crucial (Li, 2021). Developing proficiency in English speaking skills is a key goal for many learners of English as a second or foreign language (Richards, 2002). Speaking is a fundamental skill in language acquisition, serving as a key indicator of a learner's overall communicative competence (Mafruudloh & Fitriati, 2020). Within Basic Speaking courses, many students encounter significant challenges, particularly in building confidence and achieving fluency (Putri & Sari, 2020). These challenges often arise from limited vocabulary, anxiety over potential errors, difficulties with pronunciation, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful speaking practice (Treve & Education, 2021). Such obstacles impede students' ability to express their ideas clearly and coherently, which in turn affects their fluency development and reduces their motivation to actively engage in oral communication activities (Nadia, 2020).

Addressing these issues is essential to foster a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and continuous improvement in speaking skills.

Traditional language teaching methods often place greater emphasis on grammatical accuracy rather than on developing fluency and natural communication skills (Agustina, 2018). Consequently, students frequently engage in repetitive drills and controlled dialogues rather than authentic conversational practice (Anum et al., 2024). This approach can lead to learner passivity, reduced motivation, and limited opportunities to use the language in meaningful, real-world contexts (Habiburrahim, 2020). To address these limitations, it is essential to adopt innovative, learner-centered strategies that promote active participation and foster the development of communicative confidence (Zaim, 2020).

In the context of Basic Speaking courses, many students face persistent challenges, particularly in terms of confidence and fluency (Wang et al., 2024). These challenges are often influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to authentic English usage, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety when speaking in front of peers (Yan et al., 2024). Many students tend to hesitate, speak in fragmented sentences, or even avoid participation due to the fear of being judged or corrected (Durdas et al., 2024). Additionally, the traditional classroom setting that emphasizes grammatical accuracy over communicative competence often fails to provide a safe and encouraging environment for students to practice spontaneous speaking (Constanza & Scholz, 2024). This lack of psychological safety and meaningful interaction leads to low speaking confidence, which in turn affects fluency, as students are not able to express their thoughts smoothly or coherently (Mamang et al., 2023). To effectively support students in overcoming these obstacles, it is crucial to adopt interactive and student-centered teaching methods that not only enhance language skills but also create a supportive atmosphere where learners feel empowered to speak (Shi et al., 2024). Thus, improving confidence and fluency should become a primary goal in Basic Speaking courses to ensure students develop strong foundational speaking abilities for future academic and real-life communication.

The the English major of Nahdlatul Ulama Lampung University, the students of second semester often struggle to express their thoughts clearly due to limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of meaningful speaking practice. These factors are interrelated and significantly hinder students' ability to communicate effectively in English. Limited vocabulary restricts their ability to find the right words to express ideas, leading to hesitation and fragmented speech. The fear of making grammatical or pronunciation errors often results in anxiety and reduced willingness to speak, especially in front of peers or instructors. Pronunciation difficulties further contribute to misunderstandings and discourage students from speaking freely, as they worry about being corrected or not understood. Additionally, the lack of meaningful and authentic speaking opportunities in the classroom environment prevents students from practicing their oral skills in real-life contexts. Without sufficient practice in engaging, purposeful conversations, students fail to build confidence and fluency, which are essential components of effective communication. Therefore, addressing these barriers through supportive, student-centered strategies is

crucial for helping learners develop the skills and confidence needed to express them selves clearly and naturally in English.

Fluency is one of the core components of speaking skills, yet it remains a significant challenge for many students in Basic Speaking courses (Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017). Fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly, naturally, and without excessive hesitation or self-correction (Costa et al., 2025). However, many learners struggle to achieve this due to limited language exposure, lack of speaking confidence, and minimal opportunities to practice in meaningful contexts (Shi et al., 2024). Project-Based Learning (PBL) offers a great way to improve speaking skills by involving students in teamwork and real-life tasks (Agustina & Efendi, 2021). With PBL, students take on meaningful projects like interviews, creating video blogs, or giving presentations, which encourage them to use the language actively and creatively (Winatha & Abubakar, 2018). This method doesn't just help students practice English in real-world situations—it also builds their ability to work with others, think critically, and boost their confidence (Zheng et al., 2021). When used in Basic Speaking classes, PBL can make the learning experience more engaging, interactive, and supportive for students as they develop their speaking abilities.

This research investigates the effective incorporation of Project-Based Learning within a Basic Speaking course to enhance learners' confidence and fluency in speaking. By analyzing students' experiences and results, the study seeks to shed light on the advantages and potential difficulties of applying PBL in beginner-level speaking classes.

METHOD

The research design of this study aimed to investigate how Project-Based Learning (PBL) can effectively improve students' confidence and speaking fluency in a Basic Speaking course. To achieve this objective, this study utilized a Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology. The steps of this study included problem identification, planning, action, observation and reflection. The design adopted from Kemmis and Taggart (Putra et al., 2022)
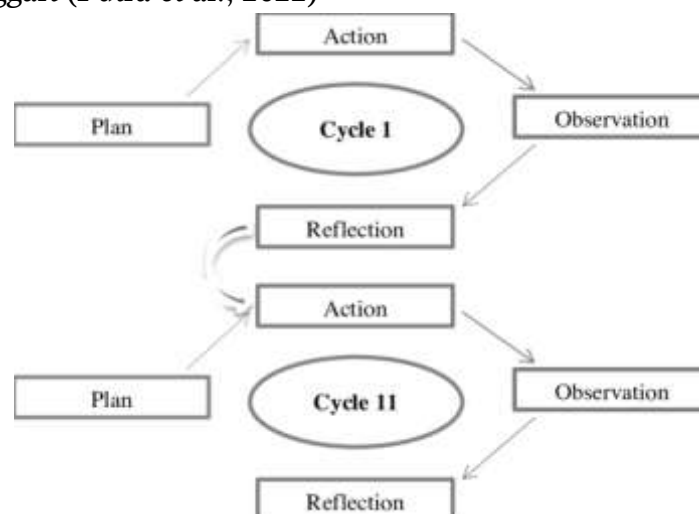

Figure 1. Kemmis and Taggart Action Research Design

The subjects are the second semester of English Education Department of Nahdlatul Ulama Lampung University, which consist of 14 students. This research was conducted during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, from March to June 2025. The data collecting technique used triangulation consist of speaking test, observation and interviews. The data were collected through classroom observation, test using students' project performances, interviews and reflective notes.

In analyzing the data, the researchers utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was employed to examine students' scores, while the qualitative data was used to depict the classroom situation during the teaching process. The qualitative data were analyzed based on the instruments used. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were examined to assess the improvement in students' speaking abilities. The researcher calculated the average score of each post-test for every cycle.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are there is improvement of the students' speaking ability using Project-Based Learning (PBL) in a Basic Speaking course.

Increased Student Confidence. Students became more confident English speakers after participating in project-based activities like role plays, interviews, and group presentations. Initially, they were hesitant and struggled to express themselves, but as they worked on these tasks, they grew more comfortable sharing their ideas and speaking in front of their peers, showing reduced anxiety and increased self-assurance.

"I used to feel anxious about speaking, but collaborating with my group made me feel more at ease and confident," one student reflected. This result aligns with earlier studies indicating that project-based learning fosters student independence and minimizes the fear of errors by prioritizing effective communication over grammatical perfection.

Improved Speaking Fluency. Students' speaking skills became more fluent over the course of the project. They spoke in longer, more cohesive sentences with fewer pauses, and their vocabulary choices were more diverse and fitting for the context. The authentic materials and real-world tasks seemed to encourage students to use English more naturally and spontaneously.
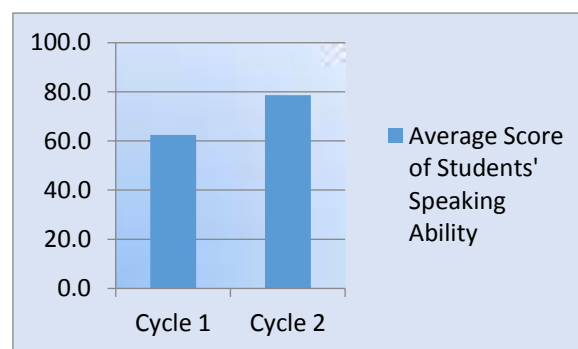

Chart 1. The Result of students' speaking Ability

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the Basic Speaking course showed a significant improvement in students' speaking fluency across two learning cycles. In Cycle 1, the average fluency score was 62.5, indicating that most students were still in the process of adjusting to the project-based approach. While some students showed signs of improvement, issues such as frequent pauses, hesitation, limited vocabulary use, and lack of confidence were still apparent during oral performance assessments.

After reflecting on the challenges from Cycle 1, improvements were made in Cycle 2, including clearer project guidelines, increased speaking opportunities, and more structured peer collaboration. As a result, the average fluency score in Cycle 2 increased to 78.6. This notable improvement demonstrates that students began to speak more fluidly, with fewer pauses, better organization of ideas, and greater confidence in using English spontaneously during presentations and group discussions.

The comparison of scores between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 illustrates that PBL had a positive impact on students' speaking fluency. The learning process encouraged them to actively use English in meaningful contexts, which enhanced their ability to express ideas more smoothly and naturally. This finding supports the effectiveness of PBL in developing speaking skills, especially fluency, among learners at the basic level. Pre-test and post-test results also revealed an upward trend in students' speaking scores. The average post-test scores increased significantly, indicating better performance in fluency, coherence, pronunciation and grammar.

The findings support the view that Project-Based Learning can be an effective method to enhance students' confidence and fluency in speaking English, particularly at the basic level. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a learner-centered instructional approach in which students are actively engaged in the learning process through the completion of meaningful and real-world projects (Muzri S et al., 2024). PBL emphasizes collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, and the use of communication skills in authentic, real-life contexts (Agustina & Efendi, 2021).

At planning stage, the researcher planned to deliver a lesson on introductions. Several preparations were made to support the teaching and learning process, including designing the lesson plan, preparing the learning materials, creating instruments for the pre-test and post-test in cycle 1, and preparing the media. The researchers also developed an observation sheet to monitor students' activities, identified the problems along with their causes both at the beginning and end of the learning process, and planned an evaluation to assess how well the students understood the material that had been taught.

The action stage, consist of six meetings for the pre-test, the action and for the post test. In this study, Project-Based Learning was used for teaching speaking. Students were assigned project tasks based on the materials covered in the Basic Speaking class. The materials consisted of several topics related to daily conversation. For each topic, students were given a project task in the form of speaking practice.

Observation was conducted using an observation sheet during the action or classroom learning sessions. The types of data observed included students' activities

(such as activeness, cooperation, and engagement), students' responses to the material or teaching method, and the classroom atmosphere during the implementation of the action. In this stage, students' confidence in speaking English was also observed, referring to their self-assurance in using spoken English in both formal and informal situations. This includes their willingness to speak, take risks in using vocabulary or grammatical structures, and their ability to continue speaking despite making mistakes. PBL facilitates a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, where learners take responsibility for their performance. Through engaging in real-world projects, students not only improve linguistic skills but also develop soft skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and time management. The sense of ownership over the learning process plays a vital role in boosting their motivation and self-efficacy.

The observation results showed that during the implementation of Project-Based Learning, students appeared more confident in expressing their ideas and were less hesitant. The collaborative nature of PBL promoted peer support and interactive learning. Students reported that teamwork enhanced their learning experiences by providing opportunities to practice English in authentic situations, receive peer feedback, and gain motivation from their group members. Classroom dynamics also became more engaging and participative over time. In addition, the project outcomes indicated that students demonstrated greater fluency in speaking English.

The reflection stage confirmed that while PBL is highly beneficial in enhancing speaking skills, its success depends on ongoing adjustments, clear expectations, and active facilitation. Moving forward, integrating self-reflection journals and peer feedback more consistently could further support learners in monitoring their own progress and developing greater autonomy in language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Project-Based Learning effectively enhances students' speaking confidence and fluency in a Basic Speaking course. Through structured, collaborative, and meaningful projects, students were encouraged to use English in authentic communication, which reduced their speaking anxiety and increased their willingness to participate. PBL provided a supportive learning environment where students practiced speaking frequently and meaningfully, leading to measurable improvements in fluency and confidence. Thus, PBL proves to be a suitable and impactful approach for developing speaking skills among Basic English learners.

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