



Implementation of Project-Based Assessment to Assess the Students' Speaking Skills in Vocational High School

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Abstract

Business and industry leaders are emphasizing the need for future employees to possess strong industry skills and, crucially, to communicate effectively in English to engage with international markets. This has led to a call for an assessment approach in vocational education that promotes higher-order thinking skills instead of just rote memorization and factual recall in English language instruction. Project-Based Assessment (PBA) is a key method in vocational education reform, engages various stakeholders through authentic tasks showcasing students' knowledge and skills. This study uses an explanatory sequential design to explore Project-Based Assessment's implementation in improving speaking skills at SMK Wisudha Karya Kudus, examining teacher and 70 students' perception and its impact on motivation and skill enhancement. The findings of this study reveal that PBA had been implemented by the teacher since 2021 as it helped the teacher to find out some aspects of students' skill by using one project. Out of 2 classes consists 70 students indicate a positive development in the performance both classes, reflecting a slight improvement in their skills. Though time management and English habitual became the obstacles in the implementation of this assessment approach, through motivation and positive feedback, the teacher is still able to help the students increasing their speaking skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Business and industry leaders are stressing the importance of strong industry skills and effective English communication for future employees to engage with international markets. This demand has sparked a call for assessment methods in vocational education that focus on higher-order thinking skills rather than mere rote memorization and factual recall in English instruction. Ardiyanti, Mujiyanto, and Wahyuni (2023) emphasize that improving students' speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is closely linked to developing emotional intelligence and motivation. They argue that by increasing student engagement and motivation through meaningful projects, activities, and assessments, teacher could help students to enhance speaking skills while fostering a supportive learning environment.

The researchers acknowledged that using appropriate methods for teaching and assessing vocational high school students learning English as a foreign language is a challenging endeavor. Megawati and Hartono (2020) highlight the importance of effective communication in enhancing student motivation, which is crucial for learning environments, including project-based assessments. Project-Based Assessment (PBA) is a vital approach in vocational education reform, involving various stakeholders through authentic tasks that demonstrate students' knowledge and abilities. Implementing authentic assessments instead of traditional assessment method, particularly through PBAs, is crucial for evaluating students' skills, including speaking. As Wiggins (1998) noted, educators can design effective project-based assessments that not only assess vocational high school students' speaking skills but also prepare them for real-world communication challenges.

According to Brown (2021), PBAs can encompass a broader range of linguistic competencies essential for effective communication, including fluency, coherence, and pronunciation. Recent research emphasizes this need. Shofyana (2014) asserts that the goal of speaking is for students to effectively communicate in their daily lives, allowing them to converse in English with friends, teachers, and others. However, in practice,

many students, particularly those in the tenth grade, remain hesitant to speak up because they have not attempted to do so in class.

According to Bradly and Evans (2024), teachers encounter significant challenges in implementing certain learning strategies due to constraints posed by curriculum and school policy. These factors dictate the priorities that educators must follow, often leading to difficulties in assessing student learning effectively. For example, school administrators may emphasize the importance of students' performance on final exams, determining which content areas should be mastered within specific timeframes. This top-down approach limits teachers' flexibility in adapting their assessments and instructional methods to better meet their students' needs.

The emphasis on standardized outcomes often creates a rigid framework within which teachers must operate, potentially limiting their ability to tailor assessments to meet the diverse needs of their students. When schools prioritize specific metrics, such as standardized test scores, teachers may feel pressured to conform to a one-size-fits-all approach. This can lead to a narrow focus on preparing students for exams rather than fostering an environment that encourages deep understanding and critical thinking.

As a result, teachers might resort to teaching strategies that prioritize rote memorization and formulaic responses, which do not necessarily capture the full range of student learning. In such an environment, personalized assessments—those designed to reflect individual student strengths, weaknesses, and interests—can become secondary. This undermines the ability to gauge a student's true comprehension of the material, as standardized assessments often fail to consider different learning styles and contexts.

Jaya (2014) highlights the importance of selecting assessment methods that utilize students' first language (L1) to effectively gauge comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research indicates that incorporating L1 into assessments can provide valuable insights into students' understanding, enabling educators to refine their teaching strategies accordingly. Additionally, when assessments focus mainly on

meeting specific benchmarks, they may fail to deliver meaningful feedback that fosters student development. In contrast, personalized assessments can reveal how students interact with the material and identify necessary adjustments in instruction to enhance their learning experience.

Ultimately, a reliance on standardized outcomes can create a disconnect between what is assessed and what is truly important for student development. By prioritizing standardized measures, educators may inadvertently neglect the opportunity to cultivate a more holistic understanding of student progress, thereby missing valuable insights into their learning experiences. This situation highlights the need for a more balanced approach to assessment, one that values both standardized outcomes and personalized insights to truly reflect student understanding and progress.

Recent research underscores the importance of each element for effective communication. Proper pronunciation ensures clarity, fluency promotes smooth speech, vocabulary enables varied expression, and grammar preserves structure, all essential for successful verbal interactions. Nunan (1992) has emphasized the importance of communicative competence in language learning, which is particularly relevant for vocational high school students. It includes four elements of speaking skills which the vocational high school students need to master, such as; fluency, pronunciation, grammatical and mastery of dictions.

Selecting the right assessment methods that meet both industry requirements and students' needs poses a significant challenge for educators. According to Broadfoot (1996), assessment techniques not only influence educational experiences and outcomes but also mirror and perpetuate societal values and disparities. She contends that assessments serve a purpose beyond simply measuring learning; they are instrumental in shaping educational policies and practices. Similarly, Benjamin (2014) emphasizes that ongoing assessment and focused instruction are essential for developing fluency. His research highlights the importance of consistent practice and exposure in promoting fluency.

Jannah and Hartono (2018) contend that speaking is a complex skill in the context of learning and teaching a second language. Therefore, teachers should implement suitable methods that enhance students' understanding and encourage them to engage in conversations with their peers. They emphasize that peer collaboration enhances communication skills, as students need to express their ideas clearly and effectively to one another.

On the same hand, Anderson and Zhang (2021) investigated the impact of project-based learning (PBL) on student performance and interest in chemistry. The research found that students engaged in PBL demonstrated significantly higher performance on assessments compared to those in traditional instructional settings. However, the research only focused on the learning proses without further elaboration on how the teacher or lecturer investigate their students' achievement in assessment process.

The other study, done by Aguilar (2021), explore the intricacies of project-based assessments in English classes, underscoring their significance in creating an engaging learning environment. The researchers point out that these assessments empower students to take control of their own learning, which boosts motivation and involvement. By engaging in projects, students can relate theoretical concepts to real-world applications, enhancing the relevance of their educational experience.

In such a qualitative study, Evans and Lee (2024) highlight the importance of project-based assessment in English language education as a means to engage students in authentic learning experiences. They argue that such assessments not only promote critical thinking and collaboration but also allow learners to apply their language skills in real-world contexts, enhancing their overall language proficiency.

Moreover, the incremental nature of the observed improvements reflects the findings of Nguyen and Pham (2022), who noted that small gains in language proficiency, particularly in pronunciation, can significantly enhance learner confidence and overall language competence.

Echoing the ideas of Nguyen and Pham (2022), Davis and Martin (2024) identify several

types of projects that can be effectively employed in educational settings. These include presentations, group discussions, and creative writing assignments. Elkins and Patel (2023) explain that projects not only promote the integration of various language skills but also encourage the incorporation of research and technology, preparing students to navigate modern challenges.

Elaborating on this, these project types enable students to apply their language skills in practical contexts, enhancing their understanding and retention of the material. Presentations, for instance, help improve public speaking and organizational skills, as students must articulate their ideas clearly and confidently. Group discussions foster collaboration and critical thinking, allowing students to engage with diverse perspectives while honing their conversational abilities. Creative writing tasks encourage originality and expression, further solidifying their grasp of grammar and vocabulary.

Moreover, by incorporating research and technology, students gain essential skills needed in today's digital age. They learn to source credible information, analyze data, and utilize various digital tools to enhance their projects. This multifaceted approach not only enriches the learning experience but also equips students with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world, making them more competitive in the job market.

From some findings stated, we can see that Project-based assessment (PBA) is an instructional method where students engage in complex projects to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problems. Therefore, PBA in EFL speaking classes for vocational high school students is an effective approach, enhancing both linguistic competence and professional readiness.

To implement Project-Based Assessment effectively in EFL classes, Wiggins (1998) recommends the following steps for teachers:

1. Select Appropriate Topics: Teachers should choose topics that are both challenging and accessible to students.

2. Choose Suitable Rubrics: The rubrics should align with the speaking tasks and be simple

enough for students to understand what aspects will be assessed.

3. Share Rubrics with Students: Teachers need to clearly explain the assessment criteria to help students focus on the relevant areas.

4. Identify Benchmark Papers: Show students with examples of high-quality speaking to illustrate the standards they should aim for, using models slightly above their current skill level.

5. Review the Speaking Process: Use checklists to focus on the speaking process and strategies, helping to understand how students develop their speaking skills.

6. Conduct Conferences: Conferencing allows for personalized discussions about students' speaking processes and provides tailored feedback on their performance.

In conducting this study, the researcher not only analyzed how Project-Based Assessment (PBA) was implemented to evaluate students' speaking skills—including pronunciation, fluency, grammatical mastery, and vocabulary proficiency—but also examined the relationship between students' vocabulary mastery and their improvement in speaking skills.

This study was different from the other studies as the researchers not only discussed about the high school EFL student's achievement in speaking but explaining how PBA enhancing vocational high school EFL speaking skills in four elements of speaking, such as pronunciation, fluency, grammatical mastery, and mastery of diction. Moreover, the implementation proses and the relation between the electronics engineering students' speaking skills and the mastery of diction had been analyzed.

METHOD

This study uses an explanatory sequential design to explore Project-Based Assessment's implementation in improving speaking skills at SMK Wisudha Karya Kudus. Cohen (2007) points out that a mixed-methods approach is valuable for examining complex issues, as it merges quantitative data with detailed qualitative insights to provide a broader understanding of research questions. Creswell (2012) describes explanatory sequential

design as a strategy that starts with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative methods to enhance the initial findings. This approach seeks to clarify or deepen the interpretation of the quantitative results, addressing both the "what" and "how many" as well as the "why" and "how." By combining these methods, researchers can gain a more comprehensive perspective on the phenomena they study.

This sequential approach provides a comprehensive view of the research problem by integrating both numerical and narrative data. Creswell emphasizes the importance of carefully planning each phase to ensure the data complement each other and contribute to a richer interpretation of the overall research findings.

In this study, the researchers examined 70 tenth-grade students in Electronics Engineering and an English teacher, referred to as Teacher A for confidentiality. Teacher A, a 34-year-old male, has taught at the school since 2015 and consistently uses Project-Based Assessment (PBA) in his classes. The researchers selected two classes for analysis, focusing on students' work and assessment results. Additionally, the study examined how Teacher A implements PBA and addresses challenges, specifically aiming to enhance students' English-speaking skills.

This study utilized four types of data: questionnaires, interview notes, observation notes, and documents showing students' assessment results.

1. Observations were conducted to assess Project-Based Assessment implementation in real classroom settings, complemented by documents like syllabi and scoring rubrics.

2. Interviews with the English teacher and students were used to gather insights on perceptions of PBA, allowing for in-depth data collection.

3. Students' assessment reports were collected from Teacher A to evaluate performance.

4. A rating scale questionnaire was distributed to 70 Electronics Engineering students to gauge their perceptions of PBA, facilitating data collection from a larger sample for statistical analysis.

Triangulation in an explanatory sequential design combines various data sources to enhance the validity and depth of research findings. In this

study, it began with formulating research questions that guided both the quantitative and qualitative phases, ensuring coherence.

Mujiyanto (2018) emphasizes the importance of triangulation in research as a method to enhance the validity and credibility of findings. He suggests that using multiple data sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives allows researchers to cross-verify information and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

This approach helps to mitigate biases and provides a richer, more nuanced analysis, ultimately strengthening the overall research outcomes. By integrating different viewpoints, triangulation can also illuminate inconsistencies in data, encouraging deeper investigation and more robust conclusions.

Initially, observations confirmed the effective implementation of Project-Based Assessment (PBA). The quantitative phase involved collecting and analyzing student assessment results, presented in clear formats like percentages and graphs to visualize trends.

Following this, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with students and an English teacher, along with questionnaires to capture student perspectives on PBA. The analysis of these qualitative findings enriched the study.

Integrating results from both phases allowed for meaningful connections between quantitative and qualitative data, enhancing the study's credibility and providing valuable insights into PBA's effectiveness in assessing student performance, thereby contributing to the educational field's knowledge base.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of PBA in Wisudha Karya Vocational High School

To investigate the implementation of project-based assessment (PBA), the researcher conducted classroom observations and interviewed an English teacher. Out of six teachers approached, only one agreed to participate. Observations were held at Wisudha Karya Vocational High School on May 2, 2024, and August 5, 2024, confirming that PBA was indeed applied in the English classes.

The teacher, referred to as Teacher A, is a 34-year-old male with a Bachelor's degree from Universitas Negeri Semarang. He has been teaching English at the school since 2015, which offers six vocational programs including Mechanical and Electronics Engineering. During the interview, the researcher aimed to understand how Teacher A implements PBA to assess students' speaking skills, focusing on the types of materials used and assessment outcomes in areas such as pronunciation, fluency, and grammar.

Teacher A employed various assessment techniques, including quizzes, Kahoot, projects, presentations, and listening activities with songs. He began using PBA in the 2020/2021 academic year, believing the Merdeka Curriculum allows for comprehensive evaluation through projects. He observed that PBA's effectiveness depends on students' engagement; motivated students excel, while less engaged ones struggle, especially in group settings.

When asked about PBA's impact on speaking skills, Teacher A noted that projects designed to enhance speaking abilities could be effective. For example, his eleventh graders worked on a project about procedural texts related to their fields, such as "How a Ship Navigates the Panama Canal" for Maritime students. However, only 60-70% managed to communicate effectively, with the remainder needing additional support.

He reported significant improvements in students' pronunciation and diction as a result of PBA. The final project required students to prepare oral presentations, fostering a focus on correct pronunciation. He emphasized the link between vocabulary mastery and speaking confidence, noting that students with broader vocabulary were more successful in presentations.

Challenges also arose, particularly with time management due to the teacher's commitments to school events, which sometimes left students without guidance. To address this, Teacher A proposed implementing an English Day, where students would communicate exclusively in English, fostering greater familiarity with the language. However, this initiative had not yet been realized.

Overall, while PBA facilitated improvements in speaking skills for some students, its benefits were not uniformly experienced across the class.

The Assessment of the Students' Pronunciation Skill

The research findings underscore the effectiveness of Project-Based Assessment (PBA) in improving students' pronunciation skills, as shown by the average scores of 35 students across two classes, TE 1 and TE 2. TE 1 saw a modest improvement, with average scores increasing from 79.143 to 80.8, reflecting a 2.09% rise. In contrast, TE 2 had a higher percentage increase of 2.49%, with scores rising from 76.686 to 78.6. Notably, TE 1 demonstrated a greater number of students achieving higher grades in the procedural text assessment compared to routine assessments.

Daily Routine Material

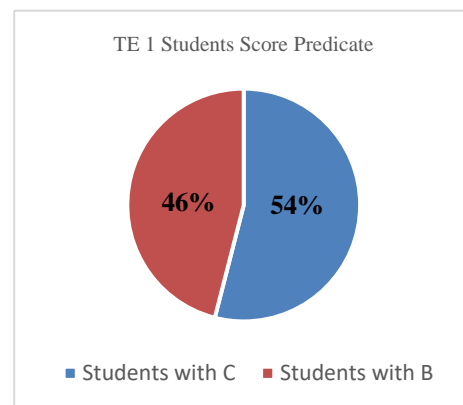


Chart 1. TE 1 Students Pronunciation Score Predicate

These results align with previous studies conducted by Sumardi (2017) and Gomez and Rodriguez (2022) indicating PBA's positive impact on language acquisition, emphasizing the importance of active engagement in enhancing pronunciation. While both classes benefited, TE 1's higher performance may be due to factors like instructional strategies and student motivation. The study confirms PBA's value in assessing pronunciation while highlighting the need for context-specific approaches in its implementation.

The Assessment of the Students' Fluency Skill

The research findings highlight the development of fluency skills among students in two classes, TE 1 and TE 2, revealing significant differences in their progress. In TE 1, students showed notable improvement, with average scores rising from 76.97 in the daily routine assessment to 82.26 in the procedural text assessment, a 6.87% increase. This positive trend is further illustrated by a decrease in the number of students receiving a C grade in the procedural text evaluation, reflecting enhanced fluency skills and increased confidence in using the language.

Conversely, TE 2's performance remained more stable, with average scores moving from 78.68 to 78.91, resulting in a minimal increase of only 0.3%. Many students continued to receive C grades, indicating limited advancement compared to TE 1.

Procedure Text Material

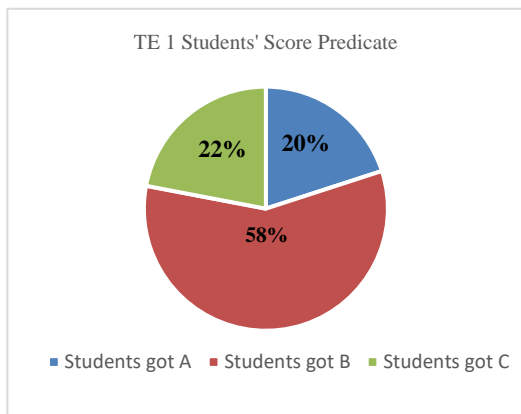


Chart 2. TE 1 Students Fluency Score Predicate

These results align with existing literature on language acquisition, particularly Benjamin's (2014) and Bell (2021) who emphasize on the importance of continuous assessment and engaging instruction for developing fluency. The stagnation in TE 2 suggests that their instructional methods may have been less effective, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to meet diverse learning needs. Future research could explore the specific techniques used in TE 1 that led to its success, providing valuable insights for educators.

The Assessment of the Students' Grammatical Mastery

The research findings offer valuable insights into the improvement of grammatical mastery among students in two classes, TE 1 and TE 2. In TE 1, students demonstrated a modest enhancement in their grammatical skills, with average scores rising from 76.42 in the daily routine assessment to 78.08 in the procedural text assessment, marking a 2.17% increase. This slight yet positive trend is further reflected in the grade distribution: while 29 students received a C in the daily assessment, the procedural assessment revealed 26 students with a C, 8 achieving a B, and 1 attaining an A. This suggests that while many students are performing satisfactorily, there remains significant potential for further growth.

In contrast, TE 2 showed a more pronounced improvement, with average scores increasing from 76.14 to 79.94, resulting in a 4.99% rise. The grade distribution also improved, with 21 students receiving a C, 9 earning a B, and 5 achieving an A. This indicates effective instructional strategies that may have contributed to TE 2's greater progress.

Procedure Text Material

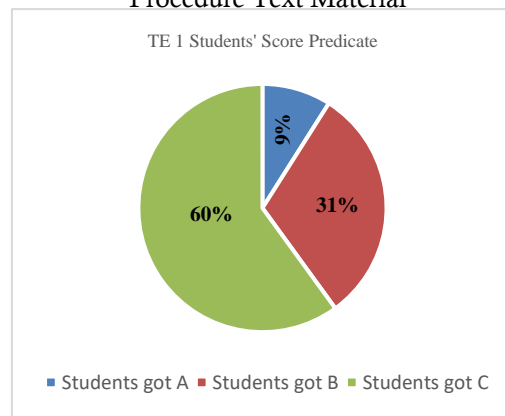


Chart 3. TE 1 Students Grammatical Mastery Score Predicate

Comparing these findings with existing literature, particularly Espinosa's (2015) emphasis on targeted instruction for grammatical mastery, reveals that specific techniques can significantly enhance understanding and retention. The greater growth observed in TE 2 suggests that the strategies used there were more effective than those in TE 1.

In summary, both classes showed progress in grammatical mastery, but TE 2's higher percentage increase indicates the effectiveness of targeted instructional strategies. This study supports the notion that focused approaches in teaching grammar can lead to significant improvements, suggesting future research should investigate the techniques used in TE 2 to enhance grammatical proficiency across various learning environments.

The Assessment of the Students' Mastery of Diction

The research findings provide important insights into the enhancement of diction mastery among students in two classes, TE 1 and TE 2. In TE 1, average scores rose from 77.74 in the daily routine assessment to 80.31 in the procedural text assessment, indicating a modest improvement of 3.3% in diction skills.

The grade distribution revealed that 27 students received a C in the daily assessment, while the procedural assessment showed 15 students earning a C, 17 achieving a B, and 3 attaining an A. This suggests a positive trend in diction mastery, though there is still room for further growth.

Conversely, TE 2 exhibited a slightly higher average score, increasing from 79.14 to 81.91, resulting in a 3.5% rise. The grade distribution in TE 2 indicated only 3 students received a C, while 25 earned a B and 7 achieved an A, highlighting a more significant improvement in diction.

These findings align with existing literature, such as Miller and Davis (2021), which emphasizes targeted feedback and interactive practice as essential for developing language skills. The greater progress in TE 2 suggests that their instructional methods may have been more interactive or feedback-driven.

Procedure Text Material

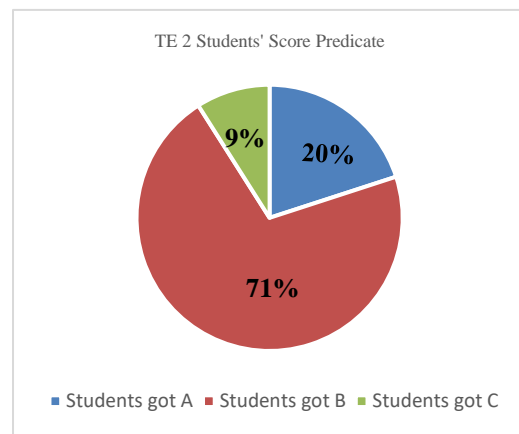


Chart 4. TE 2 Students Mastery of Diction Score Predicate

This study underscores the need for innovative teaching approaches to enhance diction skills and emphasizes the potential of project-based assessment in language education, facilitating significant skill development and learner engagement. Future research could investigate the specific strategies in TE 2 that contributed to its success.

The Relation between the Students' Speaking Skills and Mastery of Diction

Vocational high school students need strong English skills, particularly in diction mastery, for several crucial reasons. Effective communication is essential for career readiness, as students must interact professionally with clients and colleagues. In a globalized job market, Amin and Bakar (2023) stated that the ability to convey ideas clearly in English is vital, especially when collaborating with international teams. Various vocational fields, including hospitality, technology, and healthcare, have specific communication standards that students must meet to enhance their employability.

Proficiency in diction also helps students articulate technical terms and complex concepts, which is critical for success in these industries. Furthermore, mastering diction boosts students' confidence when speaking English, which encourages participation in class discussions, interviews, and networking opportunities. This confidence is especially important in customer-

facing roles, where clear communication improves relationships and client satisfaction.

For those pursuing further education, strong diction skills can lead to greater academic success by facilitating engagement with course materials and discussions. Overall, mastering diction contributes not only to vocational success but also to personal development, empowering students to express their thoughts clearly in various aspects of life.

The relationship between speaking skills and diction mastery, as revealed in my research findings, highlights the critical role that diction plays in effective communication. Diction refers to the clarity and distinctness of speech, encompassing the choice of words, pronunciation, and overall articulation. This aspect of language is essential because it directly influences a student's ability to express themselves verbally.

When students possess strong diction, they are more likely to communicate their thoughts and ideas clearly, enabling their audience to understand them without confusion. Effective diction allows for more nuanced expression, making it easier for speakers to convey emotions and intent. Conversely, weak diction can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, hindering effective communication.

Thus, mastering diction not only enhances a student's speaking skills but also builds their confidence in public speaking and everyday conversations. Bintang and Saraswati (2020) identify that students usually become more adept at using precise language and clear pronunciation, they improve their overall communication abilities.

This relationship underscores the importance of incorporating diction-focused training in educational curricula, as it equips students with the necessary tools to articulate their thoughts effectively and engage meaningfully in various contexts. Ultimately, a strong command of diction is foundational for success in both academic and professional communication.

In both TE 1 and TE 2, improvements in diction mastery were observed, with TE 1 showing a 3.3% increase and TE 2 a 3.5% increase. These enhancements likely correlate with better speaking skills. For example, many students in TE 1 improved from lower grades (C) in daily

assessments to higher grades (B and A) in procedural assessments, indicating a significant boost in their ability to articulate ideas clearly and confidently.

Similarly, TE 2's higher percentage of students achieving B and A grades reflects the effective instructional strategies that likely contributed to improved diction and speaking skills. Overall, these findings suggest that mastery of diction is foundational for developing speaking abilities. As students enhance their diction through targeted strategies, corresponding improvements in their speaking skills can be expected, highlighting the importance of focusing on diction mastery to cultivate effective communication.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that project-based assessment (PBA) at Wisudha Karya Kudus Vocational High School significantly enhances students' speaking skills. Through practical projects, PBA enables teachers to assess a range of language abilities, leading to improved understanding and student engagement. The findings reveal notable advancements in pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and diction, especially benefiting students with lower language proficiency levels.

Specifically, TE 1 showed more substantial gains in foundational skills, whereas TE 2 demonstrated superior performance in diction mastery. The study underscores the importance of developing tailored assessments and continuously refining the PBA framework to optimize language learning experiences and equip students for future communication challenges.

Furthermore, the research suggests that incorporating a variety of resources, including digital tools, will better engage students and inspire them to explore the language more deeply. Adopting differentiated instruction strategies can help accommodate the diverse proficiency levels within the classroom, creating an inclusive learning environment.

Organizing professional development workshops for teachers serves as a valuable platform for sharing effective teaching practices. By fostering collaboration and dialogue among educators, these

workshops create an environment where innovative strategies can be exchanged and refined.

This holistic approach not only aims to enhance the effectiveness of Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) but also focuses on improving students' speaking skills and overall language proficiency. As teachers implement these shared practices, students become better equipped for real-world communication scenarios. Ultimately, this initiative contributes to a more cohesive educational framework that prioritizes practical language use, preparing students for success beyond the classroom.

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