



Teacher's strategies to enhance students' speaking engagement in ESP classroom at vocational school

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Abstract

Speaking proficiency plays a vital role in English language education, especially in vocational settings where learners are expected to use English in professional environments. While English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is gaining more recognition, there are still not enough studies exploring how focused teaching strategies influence student engagement in speaking tasks in vocational ESP contexts. This project investigates the teaching strategies used by an English teacher to promote student engagement in speaking, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the reported impacts of those strategies in an ESP setting for Mechatronics students in a vocational high school. A qualitative case study approach is used, with data collected through class observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis. Findings indicated that the teacher applied a series of speaking strategies and practice, such as project-based learning (PjBL), role-play, group discussions, and drilling practices, and these all responded to different dimensions of student participation; specifically, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation. Challenges included, distractions of mobile phones, poor instructional time and large class sizes, yet the methods seemed to foster students' participation. Learners with the highest levels of proficiency reported the highest levels of confidence; while learners that participated with lower levels of proficiency reported that they benefited from more direct guided instruction. The study suggests that the use of a range of speaking strategies in an ESP context can be effective in engaging and involving students in learning contexts. The implications of this study include the necessity of improving the practices of teachers, educational entities, and policymakers', providing vocational students for communication requirements in the workplace.

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INTRODUCTION

The English education in vocational settings needs to be aligned with the development of students' specialized skills and geared toward equipping them for their future careers in specific professions (Mahbub, 2018). Vocational schools are expected to equip their students with both proper knowledge and practical communication skills that align with the demands of the working world. In line with this goal, a more specific and goal-oriented approach to English language education is needed, namely, English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) stated that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a language teaching approach designed to meet the specific needs of learners in a particular field of study. In the context of Vocational High Schools (SMK), teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) goes beyond general English teaching by incorporating industry-related terminology, phrases, and communication techniques relevant to students' future professions. According to Muliyah and Aminatun (2020), the implementation of ESP is essential in a vocational high school environment due to the different linguistic demands and specific language requirements of each vocational department.

The need for ESP classes in a vocational context is proven to be strongly linked to the wider context of English as a global language. Due to globalization, and rapid advancements in technology, the ability to communicate productively in English in technical and professional contexts is an essential skill in today's workforce. Various aspects of life, including education, business, and global communication require some participation in the English language. English is often seen more as a bridge for intercultural and international connection. Many employers recognize English as an essential skill, alongside technological competencies, as one of the most critical requirements in the future job market (Nambiar et al., 2019). To effectively use the target language, students need to acquire various English skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Of all skills, speaking is arguably the most important. Nguyen Van Huy et al. (2024) explain it as the process of constructing and presenting meaning through verbal and non-verbal means embedded in a variety of social situations. Richards (2008) also stated that speaking is the most valuable productive skill in language learning because it is the predominant means of communicating in social discourse. In addition, Brown (2001) stressed that it is a reality that being proficient in English means being proficient in spoken English, because speaking is the skill that best represents one's overall ability to use language to achieve desired meanings in the social context.

In light of the importance of speaking skills for workplace communication, it is important for students to be involved in speaking activities. The extent of the success of English teaching in VHS is reliant on students being engaged, in this case in speaking activities. When Fredricks et al. (2004) refer to engagement as students' interest, enthusiasm, and participation in the learning process, engagement is central in motivating students to participate in speaking tasks, which in turn allows them to develop their language and degree of learning. There were discussions in my observations of organizations against motivation, as motivation is closely connected with engagement, students who are motivated would speak up and participate in the classroom's language use. Accordingly, it must be an important priority for English teachers to create engagement in ESL classrooms, especially in Indonesia, where students will have significantly fewer opportunities to transfer language abilities into English speaking in the community. Delfino (2019) stated that student engagement can be defined three ways, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Behavioral engagement is simply the active participation (in academic and non-academic contextual activities), cognitive engagement is when students put the effort forward by simply 'doing' for what they feel is worth, and emotional engagement refers to how students feel towards their learning, for example enjoyment, confusion, boredom. These components work together to support students' academic success and overall learning outcomes.

Student engagement in speaking activities is influenced by several factors, including their language proficiency, the atmosphere of the classroom, and the teaching methods employed (Fredricks et al., 2004). Instructional approaches to effective speaking emphasize student involvement, developing a climate of support, and utilizing motivating tasks suited to different learning styles (Harmer, 2007). Beginning learners struggle with speaking tasks because they have not yet acquired enough vocabulary and grammar knowledge. This lack of knowledge breeds anxiety and diminished involvement. Meanwhile, intermediate students are more willing to engage, but they still do not maintain the fluidity of speech that Nation and Newton (2009) say is needed for spontaneous communication such as discussions and debates. Advanced students typically do get involved more fully because they are able to share the emotional and complex thoughts that they

have, and therefore engage more readily in the dialogue. However, they find it boring or become disengaged when tasks do not provide sufficient challenge or relevance (Dörnyei, 2001). Certainly, the classroom environment is an important aspect of engaging students. Teachers who help create a socially inclusive and welcoming environment are likely to remain the most engaging individual in the student life cycle. Finally, the strategy a teacher employs impacts how students engage in speaking activities. Hattie (2008) has asserted that models for cooperating/collaborating on work, project-based learning and on-going formative feedback capitalize on student engagement, involvement and independence, thus raising or contributing to overall engagement.

Different strategies have been employed in the teaching of speaking in various academic contexts. A few of the common strategies include: groupwork, role-play, creative projects, and drilling. Cooperative learning contexts lend themselves particularly well to language negotiation (Nation & Newton, 2009). Harmer (2007) stated that role-play allows students to participate in different social circumstance by role-playing, thus allowing them to use language in context. Šolcová (2012) observed that creative activity of a similar nature to a real-life context develop fluency, because students focus on completing task rather than on language correctness. Drilling as described by Thornbury (2005), where students repeatedly use language by repeating words, phrases, or entire construction, they can develop pronunciation but also help memorize the structural use of language.

Previous researchers have investigated different strategies to improve English speaking and conversation skills in secondary schools and vocational schools. Hasibuan et al. (2022) found that the method utilized by teachers in a secondary school, in combination with role play, and when providing the opportunity for students to orally have discussions whilst interacting with illustrated materials and teachers employing the textbooks, stories and educational games, contributed to improved speaking and conversation skills. Hardika and Pratolo (2025) working with a vocational class of Broadcasting found that telling stories i.e. orally narrating stories and having discussions using social media improved student fluency and openness to participate in speaking, not just in a social or academic classroom. However, this is not just blurring the lines of the social or academic classroom, Istiara et al. (2023) also made connections to communication and speaking performance by levels of student engagement with Indonesian junior high school students and found an improvement in performance levels when the students were engaged or actively participating with their peers (also interpretation/performance of speaking), which has been made explicit previously in earlier texts. According to Tri Ramdani and Sugiarto (2022) and Sukmojati et al. (2023), game based or ice-ball based teacher activity strategies and similar games like guessing games in online classes have improved students' (learners') confidence and enjoyment utilising and speaking, in context - social or academic and does not preclude triggering intention to speak in these instances when engaging socially. These studies have shown that interactive and engaging approaches are a primary area of consideration when developing an understanding of strategies to improve speaking skills. Although numerous studies have assessed teaching strategies and student engagement in general English classrooms, limited research has been published concerning similar works with Mechatronics classes at a vocational school level. The intent of this study is to address the gap in the research by focusing on how English speaking strategies can be used to promote behavioral, affective and cognitive engagement of the Mechatronics students whose learning needs are intrinsically linked to technical and industry-based outcomes. A deeper investigation into the implementation of speaking strategies in this context may offer a more comprehensive understanding of how students participate, respond emotionally, and process learning in a vocational high school environment, particularly in Mechatronics.

This research aimed to investigate the strategies used by an English teacher to enhance speaking engagement with students in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom in a vocational high school context especially in Mechatronics department. It also sought to understand the challenges the English teacher faced while implementing these strategies, and it examined the teacher's perception of the impact of the teaching strategies on the students' speaking engagement based on the teacher's perspective. The findings are expected to provide some ideas for English teachers, students, schools, policymakers and future researchers. Firstly, for the teachers, this research offers practical responses and solutions to offer in vocational contexts, for example, using authentic materials or task-based speaking activities in ESP classes. Secondly, for students, it offers opportunities for a more relevant and engaging learning experience connected to their future communication needs. For schools and policymakers, understanding how ESP teaching links to vocational outcomes may help improve teacher preparation and curriculum design. While this study

presents one case of English in the Mechatronics Department of a vocational high school, it cannot be claimed to represent all vocational contexts in Indonesia, the findings are useful in providing an initial understanding of improving ESP teaching, and would lead to future research in similar educational contexts.

This study contains three main focuses in relation to speaking instruction in the ESP classroom with a focus toward the Mechatronics department in vocational schools. First, this study describes the strategies that English teachers employ to support speaking engagement for the students in Mechatronics classrooms. Second, it explores the challenges the teachers experienced when using the strategies, which may include teaching barriers and contextual barriers that limit student engagement in active participation. Third, this study examines the impact the strategies have on the students' speaking engagement through behavioural, emotional, and cognitive focus as identified and reported by the teacher.

METHODS

This investigation used a qualitative research design with a case study approach in a vocational high school that was selected because of the purpose of the research and potential to provide rich data on the implementation of strategies to deepen students' speaking engagement. The selected school was also the site of the researcher's teaching internship program, which also contributed to the convenience of access to the research site and participants. This background allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into the classroom environment, observe the continuity of teaching practices, and better understand the strategies employed by the English teacher in relation to students' participation and speaking performance.

The participant in this study was an English teacher who teaches in the Mechatronics department at vocational high school. The participant was selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in teaching ESP and their active involvement in teaching speaking. To maintain ethical standards, the identity of the participant was kept confidential, and informed consent was obtained prior to the study. Data were collected using three main techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during speaking sessions in the ESP classroom to capture authentic teacher-student interactions and engagement dynamics. The researcher adopted a non-participant observation role and recorded descriptive field notes focusing on teaching techniques, student responses, and classroom atmosphere. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher to explore their reasoning behind chosen strategies, perceived effectiveness, and challenges in fostering student engagement. The interviews were recorded with the participant's permission and then transcribed for analysis. Documentations, including lesson plans, student worksheets, and teaching materials, were also collected to support and triangulate the data.

This qualitative case study highlights the importance of collecting reliable and credible data to support the research findings. To achieve this, the researcher validated the accuracy of findings and conclusions through member checking, a credibility technique recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). In this process, participants were given access to the research findings to review, confirm, and provide feedback. After the initial data analysis, the researcher prepared a summary of the findings and organized a feedback session with the participant. During the session, the participant reviewed the summary, clarified information, and offered corrections or confirmations as needed. This feedback was essential for ensuring the clarity, accuracy, and relevance of data interpretation, thus enhancing the study's credibility and dependability.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, where data were reduced, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the teaching strategies employed, types of engagement observed (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive), and the challenges faced in ESP speaking instruction. Manual coding was used to analyze observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents, allowing for in-depth interpretation rooted in the context of vocational education. The data analysis process used a thematic analysis approach. The data were analyzed in multiple stages to ensure a thorough understanding of the data's conceptual development. The first stage was data reduction; the researcher reduced and summarized the raw data that was collected from the observation notes, interview transcripts and document analysis notes. This step included highlighting pertinent statements and omitting irrelevant information. The second stage categorized the data into codes, based on patterns that recur concerning the research foci, like teaching techniques, type of student engagement (behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement), and

instructional concerns referencing difficulties in the ESP classroom. The third stage faced this codes together and was classed under the conceptual themes represented meaningfully the research findings of the study. During the interpretive stage, the researcher synthesized and linked themes to theoretical frameworks or previous studies to explore the intention of contributors. Coding was done manually, to ensure closeness to the data and preserve locational location. The researcher explored credibility through a member check. The participant was given a summarized view of the findings to validate the findings. This multi-layered analysis enabled the researcher to construct a rich, contextually grounded and embodied interpretation of how English speaking strategies and engagement impacted student engagement in the ESP post-secondary vocational classroom.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Teaching Strategies Used by Teacher to Teach Speaking

This section provides a study of the teaching strategies to enhance students' speaking engagement employed by a teacher, in response to the first question. A comprehensive explanation is provided below.

Project-Based Learning

Based on the observation, the first activity in the classroom was greeting the students and reviewing the previous lesson. The teacher implemented Project-Based Learning (PjBL) by assigning students to continue working on their English-speaking project related to Mechatronics, such as creating a simple product presentation or explaining a work procedure in English. In this activity, the students were asked to present the progress of their group project in front of the class. The teacher facilitated the process by providing feedback and encouraging their peers to respond or ask questions. This data was supported by observation notes as follows.

The teacher began the English lesson by instructing the X1 Mechatronics students to continue working on their Smart Home projects and prepare their final presentations in English for their final assessment. The students were guided to complete their Smart Home projects and then present them in English in front of the class. During the observation, the students were actively engaged in completing their projects based on their own interests and major, which fostered their creativity, motivation, and enthusiasm in using English to communicate their ideas. (Observation Notes)

The data were supported by the teacher's interview as follows.

"When we were under the leadership of Ms. Dyah, we were required to use PjBL or Project-Based Learning. So, all of our teaching and learning processes had to be based on that method, it had to follow the PjBL approach." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

This shows that PjBL was not implemented casually, but was a requirement and a systematic approach within the classroom. The teacher was intentional in designing each activity to align with PjBL principles. This, in turn, encouraged the students to be more engaged, collaborative, and purposeful in their learning, as they dealt with realistic scenarios related to their future employment in technical fields. Furthermore, by employing PjBL, the teacher fostered an interactive classroom atmosphere where communication and creativity were encouraged, adding depth to their language practice.

"...so then we just had to choose the right material for the students, and if possible, we were encouraged to direct it toward PjBL as well." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The implementation of PjBL in this context effectively promotes student engagement and practical language use. By working on projects relevant to their vocational fields, students are more motivated and confident in using English. This finding supports previous research such as Mafrudloh and Fitriati (2020), who concluded that Project-Based Learning improved speaking confidence and classroom participation among vocational students. Likewise, Muyassaroh and Prasetyowati (2024) found that PjBL increased student autonomy and engagement when the tasks were directly connected to their vocational expertise, making the learning more meaningful and

motivating. Aligned with ESP goals, PjBL bridges language learning and career preparation, improving students' readiness for real-world communication.

Role play

Based upon the observation, the teacher had enabled the role-play so that students could practice an authentic speaking context that pertains to their future career as engineers. In addition, the activity pushed students to be active, collaborative, and communicative as if they were in an actual working professional environment. The teacher supported the process, by facilitating students' presentations, seeking potential areas where he/she could provide some constructive feedbacks, and helping their confidence. It also developed interpersonal skills as well as creativity because each student was acting in their role in pairs in front of their peers. Overall role-play provided students opportunities to improve their ability to communicate their ideas in English and work together as a team. The data was corroborated by the teacher's interview as follows.

The teacher implemented role-play during the English class by asking the students to come to the front of the class in pairs to practice presenting their final project. She called two groups and gave brief instructions on how to deliver their presentations properly. The task for the students was to present their projects as professional engineers, demonstrating their expertise and confidence in front of the class while the teacher observed their performance. After the presentations, the teacher provided feedback to help the students improve their speaking skills and delivery. (Observation Notes)

The data were supported by the teacher's interview as follows.

"I think everything has already been covered. For example, role play means they act out during their presentations, so that can be considered role play. As for project-based learning, we are already implementing it, and it also involves pair and group work because they always work in that way." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The observation and interview results demonstrate that the role play was implemented to encourage students' speaking involvement in the ESP classroom context. Students presented their projects through role play mimicking real-life workplace situations in the mechatronics field so they were able to draw from their experiences using English within a professional context, this supports the notion by Kayi (2006) that role play refers to putting learners in a social role to encourage meaningful interaction. This also supports Nunan (2003) idea of role plays offer a safe space for language practice before using language in the real world. Students reinstated their fluency and their spontaneity during the presentation indicated they were beginning to internalize the language. Wahyuni et al. (2016) stated that role play technique gives more advantages for the learners' speaking, as it puts the learner in real-life situations for providing meaningful experience in practicing conversational English which leads them to fluency and confidence in developing their second language and vocab building. The teacher had followed almost the steps by Huang (2008), and her steps included mapping out roles, preparing, performing, and evaluating, the activity was both engagement and effective in allowing students to develop their speaking skills.

Group Discussion

Group discussion is one of the strategies used by the teacher to promote students' speaking engagement in the ESP classroom. This strategy allows students to collaborate in performing language tasks, share ideas, and support each other in practicing English, especially in preparing their project-based presentations. In vocational education settings, where students are trained for practical fields, group or pair activities help simulate real-life work collaboration and provide a safe space for language practice.

The teacher asked the students to create a puzzle using Canva in small groups, with each group consisting of four to five students. Each group was then required to select a tool or component related to their smart lamp project, such as a resistor, a microcontroller, or a sensor, and transform its image into a puzzle. After completing their puzzles, each group exchanged them with another group. They then identified relevant vocabulary related to the tool and described the object shown in the puzzle they received. Afterwards, each group presented their descriptions in front of the class, demonstrating their

understanding of the tool's function, its role in their project, and its importance within the context of their future workplace as professional engineers (Observation notes)

The data were supported by the teacher's interview as follows.

"For group work, almost all of the tasks are supposed to be done in groups. That is actually a requirement from the school." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The statement indicates that group work is not a personal use of strategy or a pedagogical choice. It relates to an overall institutional initiative or schoolwide policy with collaborative learning as a standard operating procedure which is purposeful inclusion of group tasks that encourage teamwork among students, peer interaction, and active engagement and participation in classroom activities. This means that for the teacher, group work is not just a strategy to boost student engagement; it is also about instituting organizational expectations and a vision of student-centred learning consistent with a school's pedagogical principles.

"Yes, there's vocabulary and simple sentences, and they're not supposed to do it individually; it should be done in groups" (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The group discussion activity observed in the ESP classroom aligns with Kayi (2006) theory, which emphasizes that group discussion encourages students to share ideas, interact meaningfully, and improve fluency in speaking. The collaborative task allowed students to actively use English in preparing and discussing their project content. These steps helped ensure the discussion was structured, engaging, and effective in enhancing students' speaking skills. This discussion activity aligns with Harmer (2007) which highlights both strengths and weaknesses. Based on observation and interviews, the advantages include improved student collaboration, freedom to express opinions, and idea sharing. However, the drawback is a less conducive classroom atmosphere due to some students dominating the group.

Drilling Question

Based on the observation and interview, the teacher consistently used drilling questions during the lesson to stimulate student participation. Throughout the explanation of the material, the teacher asked short, direct questions to the students, prompting them to respond immediately. This strategy proved to be one of the most effective ways to engage students in speaking activities. Many students responded quickly and confidently, especially during moments like roll call or when the teacher asked them directly. It created a sense of healthy competition and kept students alert and involved throughout the session.

This is supported by the observation:

The teacher often used drilling questions during the lesson, and this strategy proved to be the most effective in engaging students to speak. Many students responded quickly and confidently when asked, creating an active and lively classroom atmosphere. (Observation notes)

The teacher confirmed this during the interview by stating:

"They usually become active when being asked questions. If they are not asked, they tend to remain passive. Especially when the session ends with attendance, they will quickly respond and compete with each other, which is enough to encourage their activeness." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The teacher's statement indicates that students often need direct prompting to participate, and in this case, drilling serves as an effective trigger to break the silence and encourage them to use English in a low-pressure environment. This strategy aligns with Brown (2001) that drilling builds students' accuracy and confidence through repetition and immediate recall. Johar and Yunus (2021) showed, in the classroom with low-proficiency students, that language drilling by English teachers helped students to improve their English. In the vocational context, where opportunities to practice English outside the classroom are limited, drilling provides a practical means of reinforcing language

use. It familiarizes students with basic sentence structures, technical vocabulary, and commonly used expressions related to their field of study, making it a valuable component of ESP instruction.

Challenges faced by the teacher while implementing the strategies

Based on the interview findings, the researcher concluded that English teachers encounter several challenges when applying strategies to teach speaking to answer the second question. This discussion refers to (Larry, 2008) theory, which outlines three main challenges teachers typically face in speaking instruction.

Lack of motivation due to influence of gadget

One of the observed challenges that hinder students' speaking engagement in the ESP classroom is the lack of motivation influenced by gadget usage. During classroom observation, it was found that several students tended to open their phones during the lesson without the teacher's instruction. Instead of using the gadget to support learning, such as for accessing dictionaries or class materials, students were seen using their phones to browse social media and entertainment content. This behavior distracted them from participating actively in the speaking activities. Deng et al. (2024) identified smartphones as a primary source of external distraction in the classroom. The main challenge, however, is not merely the presence of technology itself, but students' lack of readiness to regulate such distractions independently, as also emphasized by Chu et al. (2021).

This finding is supported by the teacher's statement in the interview:

"...well, maybe the challenge is that almost all the students are more interested in gadgets, which makes their motivation to learn quite low."

The teacher acknowledged that students are often more interested in their gadgets than in classroom activities, resulting in decreased learning motivation and speaking engagement. To overcome this issue, the teacher implemented a rule requiring students to submit their phones to the teacher's desk before the lesson begins. This is supported by Deng et al. (2024), who found that student engagement significantly increased when smartphones were kept out of reach during class. This classroom management strategy helps minimize distractions and keeps students focused on speaking activities. Although gadgets can aid learning, their misuse in class hinders students' active engagement in meaningful English speaking tasks.

Insufficient Time

The second challenge is the limited amount of time available for instruction. Teachers often struggle to deliver the full material due to time constraints caused by factors such as students arriving late, unexpected meetings, or schedule interruptions for worship or break times. These issues reduce time efficiency during lessons. As a result, the teacher must manage time wisely by designing simple yet clear teaching strategies to ensure the material can still be completed within the same day.

"Since the English class is scheduled after their practice class, some students arrive late. So, I have to ask them to go to the counseling office first to get a late slip before they can enter. It requires a considerable amount of time. Sometimes, the lesson also overlaps with break time, which further reduces the available class time." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

This is in line with Lynch (2015), who highlighted the fact that, for many learners, time parameters discourage the genuine processing and practice of spoken language. Therefore, teachers need to choose tasks within the time constraints that are both manageable and foster opportunities for getting work done in class, while finding a balance of language exposure with meaningful engagement. Teachers may wish to incorporate shorter communicative tasks, spoken activities based on repetition, or structured conversations in groups or pairs that can be accomplished in less time, but arguably utilize language actively. By working with this strategy that does not allow students to miss out on opportunities to engage in speaking tasks, it may reduce the impact of time management so as to not take away the quality of learning for the students that is limited by the schedule. Time management is really not a scheduling issue, it is a pedagogical issue that requires thoughtful consideration and planning.

Overcrowded English Classes

The last challenge faced by the teacher is managing overcrowded English classes. A classroom with too many students often becomes less conducive to learning, causing distractions and reduced focus. To address this, the teacher needs to form smaller study groups to encourage critical thinking and help minimize the impact of the crowded environment.

“There are quite a lot of students in one class, so when the class gets noisy during the lesson, sometimes I just stay quiet until they realize it and settle down on their own. But sometimes, I also remind and warn them to stay quiet until I finish explaining.” (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

This issue aligns with the findings of Indra Sudrajat (2021), who revealed that overcrowded classes result in challenges such as increased noise levels, lack of individual attention, and poor classroom arrangement, all of which negatively affect teacher and student interaction. The more students there are in a class, the harder it becomes for teachers to build meaningful engagement. Therefore, creating smaller group settings can help teachers regain control and ensure that learning remains interactive and productive despite the overcrowded environment. This is supported, who reported that overcrowding in classrooms negatively affected student performance, identified as the primary source of low achievement in public schools. The overcrowded classroom was determined to greatly affect the students' attitudes and behaviors toward their schoolwork, in a negative manner.

The impact of the teaching strategies used by the teacher in enhancing students' speaking engagement, as viewed by the teacher

This part presents the findings related to how the English teacher's speaking strategies influenced student engagement, particularly in response to the third research question. It describes the impact of the speaking activities on students' involvement in using English for communication. Additionally, the teacher reported that students demonstrated engagement across behavioral, emotional (affective), and cognitive aspects.

Behavioral Engagement

First, in terms of behavioral engagement, all students participated in the guessing game activity. However, students with higher academic performance tended to dominate the session by frequently providing correct answers. On the other hand, lower-achieving students were less involved verbally, as they appeared to process the tasks more slowly compared to their peers. Consequently, the activity primarily benefited the high-achieving students in developing their speaking abilities. This finding is further supported by classroom observation data.

Some students dominated the activity when the teacher conducted drilling questions. They actively responded to the teacher's questions with correct answers. They earned points for each correct answer, which motivated them to compete in collecting as many points as possible. They appeared engaged and enthusiastic. However, there were also some less dominant students who did not get the opportunity to answer. They no longer want to make an effort because their scores are already far behind.(Observation Notes)

According to the teacher's interview, the level of student engagement is influenced by the way the teacher provides scaffolding during the learning process. Students with higher achievement levels generally show proactive behavior and are quicker in preparing for classroom tasks. In contrast, those with lower achievement levels need more structured guidance and clear, step-by-step instructions to participate effectively. To help these students, the teacher intentionally called on them during activities, giving them designated time to respond. As the teacher stated:

“I facilitate their speaking by giving opportunities and offering clues when they hesitate.” (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

In summary, the students' confidence played a key role in their active participation in classroom communication, which had a positive impact on their behavioral engagement (Boonkit, 2010). These students also tended to achieve higher speaking scores compared to their peers.

According to Harmer (2007), effective speaking strategies promote student engagement by offering meaningful chances for communication. On the other hand, students with lower academic performance showed less involvement in speaking activities, which could limit their progress in developing speaking abilities. To promote fair learning outcomes, it is important for teachers to provide equal chances for every student to participate and practice speaking. This approach encourages positive learning behaviors and helps students reach their full potential (Barkley et al., 2014).

Affective Engagement

Second, the students also demonstrated strong affective engagement during the role play activity. Based on the observation, many students showed enthusiasm and curiosity when the teacher assigned them to perform a role play in pairs. This enthusiasm reflects positive emotional involvement, which is a key aspect of affective engagement. High-attaining students voluntarily took the initiative to perform, showing confidence and enjoyment. Meanwhile, low-attaining students preferred to prepare their lines in writing beforehand to feel more secure during their performance. Despite the difference in preparation methods, both groups showed equal willingness and emotional investment in participating, indicating that the activity successfully engaged students effectively regardless of their proficiency level.

The teacher provided a dialogue text, then asked the students to read and perform a role play. Several student pairs were able to act out the dialogue easily, but not all pairs had the same opportunity to participate. Then, the teacher asked all students to write their own dialogue, and called them in pairs to perform the role play without reading from their scripts." (Observation Notes).

According to the interview, the teacher explained that her students showed great enthusiasm during the preparation phase, particularly because she provided step-by-step writing guidance to support the lower-achieving students. She emphasized that engaging students' cognitive processes made them more interested and involved in the learning activities.

"Students become more active in speaking when they are asked to play and work in pairs. They tend to participate more in class when I engage them in speaking activities, such as role play. They feel more confident to come forward and start speaking." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The implementation of role play effectively fostered students' affective engagement by building a positive emotional atmosphere in the classroom. Students showed enthusiasm and confidence when performing with their peers, indicating enjoyment and emotional connection with the task. This finding is in line with Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) who emphasized that interactive speaking activities like role play reduce students' anxiety and increase their motivation to communicate.

Cognitive Engagement

The cognitive aspect of engagement refers to students' mental effort, concentration, and willingness to understand and master complex learning tasks. In this study, cognitive engagement was observed during project-based and group discussion activities, where students were required to collaborate, plan, and present ideas in English related to their Mechatronics major.

Based on the observation, the teacher implemented Project-Based Learning by asking students to create a product explanation and present it in English. This required students to brainstorm, write scripts, rehearse, and finally perform their project presentations in front of the class. During the activity, most students actively participated by discussing in groups, sharing ideas, and revising their presentations based on peer or teacher feedback. Students appeared focused and invested in the task, demonstrating a high level of cognitive involvement.

Students were discussing in small groups to prepare a product explanation using English. Some were writing down key points, while others were practicing how to say them aloud. They used their phones to look up technical terms in English, and the teacher walked around to assist. All groups seemed focused and took the task seriously. Some even asked the teacher for feedback before presenting. (Observation notes)

This indicates that the students were not only using language but also thinking critically and creatively to structure their ideas, apply vocabulary, and communicate technical concepts in English. In the interview, the teacher shared:

"In project or group discussion tasks, students tend to think more seriously because they need to explain something in English. I support them by giving clear instructions so they can focus and know what to say." (The researcher interviewed with Mrs. D.H)

The teacher highlighted the importance of providing scaffolding and clear instructions to help students understand the tasks and perform well. Supporting this, students' test results showed that most met the minimum passing grade, indicating that the speaking activities effectively enhanced their performance. This suggests that students were not only involved but also cognitively engaged with the tasks. Nation (2001) stated that meaningful speaking tasks stimulate language processing, which supports real-time comprehension and production as essential elements of cognitive engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the use of varied speaking strategies such as Project-Based Learning, role play, group discussions, and drilling questions can significantly enhance students' engagement in ESP classrooms, particularly among Mechatronics students. These approaches promote meaningful communication and are well aligned with the students' vocational backgrounds. High-performing students tended to show greater confidence and active involvement in class activities, while lower-performing students made noticeable progress when provided with clear, structured guidance. Although teachers encountered challenges such as gadget distractions, time constraints, and overcrowded classrooms, these strategies still proved effective in improving students' speaking skills and overall engagement. To encourage more dynamic and meaningful learning experiences, English teachers in vocational schools can benefit from applying interactive and student-centered teaching methods that maintain students' interest and promote active participation. When lessons are relevant to students' fields and directly involve them in the learning process, language acquisition becomes more effective. Improving classroom conditions by ensuring manageable class sizes, allocating sufficient instructional time, and minimizing distractions can further support the successful application of these strategies. Additionally, providing teachers with targeted professional development can enhance their capacity to design and implement effective ESP-based speaking activities. At the curriculum level, integrating task-based learning and real-world communication activities can help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and workplace needs. Future research may involve a broader range of vocational departments and larger participant groups to assess the generalizability of these findings. It may also explore how various teaching strategies affect other language skills such as listening, reading, and writing in order to offer a more comprehensive picture of student engagement in ESP learning environments.

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