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The Use of Engage, Study, Activate in Teaching Eighth Grade Students' Speaking Skill

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Abstrak

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini meneliti penggunaan pendekatan *Engage, Study, Activate* (ESA) dalam mengajarkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris kepada siswa kelas delapan di MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW. Penelitian ini melibatkan 51 siswa dari dua kelas dan dilaksanakan melalui dua siklus penelitian tindakan, yang masing-masing terdiri dari tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan tindakan, pengamatan, dan refleksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui penilaian kemampuan berbicara serta pengamatan kelas, lalu dirangkum secara deskriptif. Pada Kelas A, nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 63,04 pada data awal (*baseline*) menjadi 70,58 pada Siklus I dan 77,69 pada Siklus II. Pada Kelas B, nilai rata-rata yang setara meningkat dari 63,12 menjadi 70,36 dan 77,77. Proporsi yang dilaporkan mencapai kriteria ketuntasan minimal meningkat dari 27% menjadi 77% di Kelas A dan dari 28% menjadi 77% di Kelas B. Pengamatan kelas juga menunjukkan partisipasi yang lebih aktif selama siklus pembelajaran berlangsung. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tahapan ESA memberikan struktur yang bermanfaat untuk melibatkan pembelajar, memfokuskan perhatian pada bentuk-bentuk bahasa, serta menciptakan peluang untuk praktik komunikatif.

Kata kunci: penelitian tindakan kelas; pendekatan ESA; keterampilan berbicara; EFL; partisipasi siswa

Abstract

This classroom action research investigated the use of the Engage, Study, Activate (ESA) approach in teaching English speaking skills to eighth-grade students at MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW. The study involved 51 students from two classes and was conducted through two action-research cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through speaking assessments and classroom observation and were summarized descriptively. In Class A, the mean score increased from 63.04 at baseline to 70.58 in Cycle I and 77.69 in Cycle II. In Class B, the

corresponding means increased from 63.12 to 70.36 and 77.77. The reported proportions meeting the minimum mastery criterion increased from 27% to 77% in Class A and from 28% to 77% in Class B. Classroom observations also indicated more active participation during the teaching cycles. The findings suggest that the ESA sequence provided a useful structure for engaging learners, focusing attention on language forms, and creating opportunities for communicative practice.
Keywords: classroom action research; ESA approach; speaking skills; EFL; student participation

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in international communication and has become an essential subject in the Indonesian educational system. Among the four fundamental language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking is particularly important because it enables learners to communicate their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ideas directly to others. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, the development of speaking skills is often considered an important indicator of students' communicative competence. However, speaking is also one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners because it requires the simultaneous use of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. Köroğlu (2017) emphasized that teaching speaking remains challenging in foreign language classrooms and requires meaningful opportunities for students to practice oral communication. Therefore, English teachers need to provide learning activities that not only develop students' linguistic competence but also encourage their confidence, participation, and willingness to communicate in English.

Despite the importance of speaking skills, many EFL students experience difficulties in expressing themselves orally, particularly in classroom situations that require spontaneous communication. These difficulties may include limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and a lack of confidence when speaking in front of classmates. Similar problems were identified through preliminary observations and interviews with English teachers and eighth-grade students at MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW. Students demonstrated relatively low speaking ability, frequently hesitated to express their ideas, and were afraid of making mistakes during speaking activities. Some students also experienced difficulties pronouncing English words and constructing appropriate sentences, while others preferred to remain silent or use their mother tongue rather than

participate in English conversations. These conditions indicated that students needed a more supportive and interactive learning environment in which they could develop their speaking skills through regular practice. In line with Suadiyatno, et al (2020), in their research which stated that interactive learning methods improved students' fluency and confidence in speaking English.

One instructional approach that can be applied to address these challenges is Engage, Study, Activate (ESA), which organizes language learning into three interconnected stages. In the Engage stage, teachers stimulate students' interest, motivation, and readiness to learn through activities such as pictures, games, questions, and discussions. The Study stage focuses on developing students' understanding of language forms, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical structures. Meanwhile, the Activate stage provides opportunities for students to use the language more freely through communicative activities such as dialogues, role-plays, group discussions, and oral presentations. This sequence allows students to prepare for communication, develop relevant language knowledge, and subsequently apply what they have learned in meaningful speaking situations. The ESA approach is particularly relevant to teaching speaking because it combines language preparation with opportunities for communicative practice. Ilinawati (2018) reported that the implementation of ESA in classroom action research improved students' speaking ability and supported positive changes in classroom learning behavior. These findings suggest that ESA may offer a practical instructional framework for helping students become more actively involved in English-speaking activities.

Previous studies have provided evidence of the potential benefits of ESA in English-speaking instruction. Hairunniza et al. (2022) investigated the effects of ESA on tenth-grade students' speaking ability at SMAN 3 Makassar and found a significant improvement in students' speaking performance, particularly in accuracy and fluency. Similarly, Wiranda (2023) reported improvements in eighth-grade students' speaking ability and confidence when ESA was implemented in teaching expressions of opinion. Fithria and Ratmanida (2019) also highlighted the relevance of ESA for junior high school students who experienced difficulties with confidence, motivation, and active participation in speaking activities. Furthermore, Aprilia et al. (2023) found that students taught through ESA achieved higher

speaking scores than those receiving instruction without the method in an Islamic junior high school context. Although these studies have demonstrated the potential of ESA, their research settings, participants, instructional activities, and methodological approaches have varied. The existing findings therefore provide a foundation for further classroom-based investigation rather than establishing that ESA will produce identical outcomes in every learning environment. In particular, the application of ESA to address the specific speaking difficulties and classroom participation problems identified among eighth-grade students at MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW had not been examined in the studies reviewed. This contextual and pedagogical gap provided the rationale for conducting the present research.

Based on these considerations, the present study aimed to investigate how the implementation of the Engage, Study, Activate (ESA) method could improve the speaking skills of eighth-grade students at MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW during the 2024/2025 academic year. Specifically, the research focused on addressing students' difficulties in speaking English, including limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, low confidence, and insufficient participation in classroom communication. The study employed classroom action research to examine the implementation of ESA through a systematic process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. By integrating engaging activities, focused language study, and communicative practice, the research sought to improve students' speaking performance while encouraging more active involvement in the teaching and learning process. The findings were expected to provide practical insights for English teachers regarding the application of ESA in Islamic junior high school classrooms and contribute contextual evidence to the existing literature on EFL speaking instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve eighth-grade students' English speaking skills through the implementation of the Engage, Study, Activate (ESA) teaching strategy. Classroom Action Research was selected because it allowed the researcher to identify classroom learning problems, implement appropriate teaching actions, observe students' progress, and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices. According to Mertler (2020), action research provides a systematic approach for educators

to investigate and improve teaching and learning practices through continuous reflection and evidence-based decision-making. The research was conducted in two cycles, following the four stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. During the planning stage, the researcher prepared lesson plans, instructional materials, and research instruments. In the action stage, the ESA strategy was implemented through three learning phases: Engage, which aimed to increase students' interest and motivation; Study, which focused on language features and speaking accuracy; and Activate, which encouraged students to use English in communicative activities. The observation stage involved monitoring students' participation and speaking performance, while the reflection stage was conducted to evaluate the results and determine necessary improvements for the following cycle.

Research Participants

The research was conducted at MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW, Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 51 eighth-grade students who were involved in English speaking activities. The study focused on improving students' speaking skills and classroom participation through the implementation of the ESA strategy. The participants were selected within the existing classroom setting, allowing the researcher to investigate learning difficulties and instructional improvements in a natural educational environment.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, and field notes. The speaking tests consisted of a pre-test and post-tests administered to measure students' speaking performance before and after the implementation of the ESA strategy. Students' speaking skills were assessed using five indicators: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and fluency. Classroom observations were conducted using an observation checklist to examine students' participation, engagement, and learning activities throughout the teaching process. Field notes were also used to document important classroom events, students' responses, and difficulties encountered during the implementation of the strategy. The combination of these instruments provided quantitative evidence of students' speaking performance and qualitative information about classroom learning processes. Creswell and Creswell (2023) explain that combining numerical and descriptive evidence can provide a

more comprehensive understanding of educational research problems.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis and classroom observation analysis. Quantitative data were obtained from students' speaking test scores, while observational data were used to describe students' learning activities and participation during the implementation of the ESA strategy. The speaking test results were analyzed by examining students' scores and calculating the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). The percentage of classical learning mastery was calculated using the following formula:

$$P\ \frac{S}{N}\ x\ 100\%$$

where (P) represented the percentage of classical learning mastery, (S) represented the number of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion, and (N) represented the total number of students. The results of the pre-test, Cycle I, and Cycle II were compared to identify changes in students' speaking performance. Meanwhile, observational data were analyzed descriptively by examining students' classroom activities, participation, and responses during the teaching and learning process. The findings from each cycle were used in the reflection stage to evaluate the implementation of the ESA strategy and determine improvements in subsequent teaching activities. As Mertler (2020) emphasizes, systematic data analysis and reflection are essential components of action research because they enable teachers to evaluate instructional practices and make informed decisions for classroom improvement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the implementation of the Engage, Study, Activate (ESA) approach to improve the English speaking skills of eighth-grade students at MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), involving 51 students from two classes, Class VIII-A and Class VIII-B. The research was conducted through two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, and field notes. Students' speaking performance was assessed using five indicators: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar,

comprehension, and fluency. The minimum mastery criterion (KKM) was set at 75. The results showed progressive improvements in students' speaking achievement from the preliminary test to the second cycle.

Improvement in Students' Speaking Achievement

The results of the speaking tests indicated that students' speaking performance improved after the implementation of ESA activities. The improvements were reflected in both the average speaking scores and the proportion of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion.

Table 1. Students' Speaking Achievement Across Research Cycles

Research Stage	Class VIII-A Mean	Class VIII-B Mean	Class VIII-A Mastery	Class VIII-B Mastery
Pre-test	63.04	63.12	27%	28%
Cycle I	70.58	70.36	65%	64%
Cycle II	77.69	78.28	78%	77%
Overall improvement in mean	+14.65	+15.16	+51 pp	+49 pp

As presented in Table 1, both classes demonstrated consistent improvement across the research stages. In Class VIII-A, the mean speaking score increased from 63.04 in the pre-test to 70.58 in Cycle I and reached 77.69 in Cycle II, representing an overall increase of 14.65 points. Similarly, Class VIII-B improved from 63.12 to 70.36 and subsequently to 78.28, with an overall increase of 15.16 points.

The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion also increased. In Class VIII-A, mastery rose from 27% in the pre-test to 65% in Cycle I and 78% in Cycle II. Class VIII-B demonstrated a comparable pattern, increasing from 28% to 64% and finally reaching a reported 77%.

These findings suggest that the implementation of ESA was associated with progressive improvements in students' speaking performance. Although the students had not fully achieved the expected learning outcomes during the first cycle, the second cycle

showed further development, indicating the value of continued practice, classroom observation, and instructional reflection.

Implementation of ESA in the Teaching and Learning Process

The ESA approach was implemented through three interconnected instructional stages: Engage, Study, and Activate. Each stage provided different learning opportunities that supported students' speaking development.

During the Engage stage, the teacher introduced learning materials through familiar situations, short videos, and introductory questions. These activities were intended to attract students' attention and encourage them to participate in English speaking activities. In the Study stage, students received explanations and guided practice related to vocabulary, sentence construction, and pronunciation. The Activate stage provided opportunities to use the language through conversations, group discussions, and oral presentations.

The classroom action research also involved instructional reflection between cycles. After evaluating the students' performance and classroom participation in Cycle I, the teaching activities continued in Cycle II to address difficulties and provide further speaking practice. The progressive improvement in students' scores suggests that the combination of language preparation and communicative practice supported their learning development.

Students' Classroom Participation and Interaction

In addition to speaking achievement, classroom observations indicated that students demonstrated positive participation in cooperative learning activities. The observation data covered several aspects of classroom interaction, including positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and group processing.

Table 2. Students' Classroom Participation Based on Observation Results

Observation Indicator	Students (n)	Percentage
Expressing opinions in groups	39	76%
Reminding peers to complete assignments	30	59%
Providing opportunities for peers to speak	41	80%

Participating in group discussions	44	86%
Demonstrating individual responsibility	36	71%
Understanding assigned tasks	42	82%
Building trust and supporting peers	38	75%
Listening to and accepting others' opinions	43	84%
Maintaining effective working relationships	33	65%
Collaborating to complete group tasks	32	63%

The observation results revealed that group discussion was the most frequently demonstrated participation behavior, with 86% of students actively involved. Furthermore, 84% listened to and accepted their classmates' opinions, while 80% provided opportunities for others to speak. These results indicate that students were generally willing to interact and communicate during classroom activities. However, several aspects required further improvement. Only 59% of students reminded their group members to complete assignments, while 63% demonstrated active collaboration in completing group tasks. These findings suggest that although ESA activities encouraged classroom interaction, students still needed additional guidance in developing responsibility and maintaining effective cooperation.

Overall, the observation results complemented the speaking test findings by demonstrating that the ESA approach was associated not only with improved speaking achievement but also with positive classroom participation and interaction.

Discussion

The Contribution of ESA to Students' Speaking Achievement

The findings demonstrated that students' speaking achievement improved progressively throughout the implementation of ESA. The mean speaking scores increased from 63.04 to 77.69 in Class VIII-A and from 63.12 to 78.28 in Class VIII-B. This improvement suggests that a structured learning process combining engagement, explicit language instruction, and communicative practice can support students' speaking development.

These findings are consistent with Hairunniza et al. (2022), whose research, reported that students' mean speaking scores increased from 61.64 to 74.73 following ESA instruction. Similarly, Ilinawati (2018) reported an improvement from 71.67 in the first cycle to 80.28 in the second cycle. Both studies support the relevance of ESA as an instructional approach for developing English speaking skills.

The present findings also correspond with Wiranda (2023), who reported progressive improvements in students' speaking achievement through ESA-based instruction. In that study, the mean speaking score increased from 53.54 in the pre-test to 76.64 in the final post-test. These similarities suggest that ESA may provide a useful instructional structure across different EFL classroom contexts.

Nevertheless, because the present research used classroom action research without a separate control group, the observed improvement should be interpreted as progress associated with ESA implementation rather than definitive evidence that ESA alone caused the improvement.

Engagement, Motivation, and Students' Confidence

The Engage stage played an important instructional role by preparing students to participate in speaking activities. Through videos, introductory questions, and familiar learning situations, students were encouraged to pay attention to the lesson and become more comfortable using English.

This interpretation is consistent with the affective perspective presented in Krashen's, in Abdullah & Ismail (2023) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which explains how emotional factors, including anxiety and motivation, can influence language acquisition. The Engage stage may have helped create a more supportive classroom atmosphere, particularly for students who initially demonstrated limited confidence in speaking English.

The findings are also relevant to the work of Ilinawati (2018), who identified improvements in classroom learning behavior following ESA instruction. Similarly, Wiranda (2023) reported positive student responses, including increased interest, motivation, and confidence in English speaking activities. Also in line with Sumarni et al (2022), stated that ESA is highly relevant as a solution for alleviating this speaking anxiety before moving on to the core material.

In the present study, the observation findings showed that 86% of students participated in group discussions and 76% expressed opinions within their groups. These results provide evidence of classroom participation, although they do not directly measure students' psychological motivation or speaking anxiety.

Language Development Through Guided Practice

The Study stage provided opportunities for students to develop the linguistic knowledge needed for oral communication. During this stage, the teacher introduced vocabulary, explained sentence structures, demonstrated pronunciation, and provided exercises to support students' understanding of English expressions.

The instructional activities correspond with Harmer's (2007) explanation of ESA, in which the Study stage focuses on language construction and accuracy. They are also consistent with the speaking assessment framework described by Brown (2004), which recognizes the importance of evaluating different aspects of oral language performance.

The improvement in students' overall speaking scores suggests that the combination of language instruction and subsequent practice was beneficial. However, the main results primarily through total speaking scores. Consequently, it was not possible to determine which individual speaking component—pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, or fluency—showed the greatest improvement without further component-level analysis.

The findings can also be compared with Sari (2019), whose research, found that ESA combined with the Eye-Spy Game was associated with improved students' vocabulary achievement. This supports the potential relevance of structured language-focused activities within ESA instruction.

Communicative Practice and Classroom Interaction

The Activate stage provided opportunities for students to apply previously learned language through meaningful speaking activities. Rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical explanations, students were encouraged to communicate through paired conversations, group discussions, and oral presentations.

This instructional practice corresponds with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching discussed by Richards (2006), which emphasizes language use for

meaningful communication. The classroom observation findings provide additional support for this interpretation. A total of 86% of students participated in group discussions, 84% accepted their classmates' opinions, and 80% provided opportunities for peers to speak. These results indicate that students demonstrated several important behaviors associated with collaborative communication.

The findings are also compatible with the classroom-based results reported by Ilinawati (2018) and Wiranda (2023), both of whom identified positive developments in students' speaking performance following ESA instruction. The improvement in mean speaking scores across two research cycles, together with the positive classroom participation results, suggests that combining these three stages can support both speaking achievement and classroom interaction.

These findings extend the classroom-based evidence discussed by Hairunniza et al. (2022), Ilinawati (2018), and Wiranda (2023) by demonstrating a similar pattern of improvement in the context of MTs Nahdlatul Mujahidin NW. The results also suggest that continuous observation and reflection are important for improving instructional practices during classroom action research.

CONCLUSION

ESA-based classroom action research was accompanied by improved speaking assessment scores and classroom participation in both eighth-grade classes. The mean scores increased from 63.04 to 77.69 in Class A and from 63.12 to 77.77 in Class B. Teachers may use ESA to structure supported speaking practice, while future studies should verify the original score records and use stronger comparative designs.

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