THE EFFECTS OF SPEECH ACTS ON EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN INDONESIA: A PRAGMATICS STUDY

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Abstract

This study focuses on the effect of speech acts on EFL students' speaking skills in Indonesia against the background of students' low speaking skills in EFL classrooms due to the lack of use of structured communication strategies. This study aims to analyse the impact of systematic use of speech acts on students' speaking skills in an EFL learning environment. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, this research involved 20 students from the English Education Department of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra as participants. Data were collected through observations and interviews that took place during three learning sessions including pre-test, test and post-test. Qualitative descriptive analysis showed that the number and complexity of students' speech acts increased significantly, while their confidence and active participation in speaking English also increased. In conclusion, speech acts can be an effective strategy for improving EFL students' speaking skills, with the implication that this approach deserves wider application in English language learning in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Speech acts, EFL students, Speaking skill*

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A. INTRODUCTION

In the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking ability is one of the essential skills that students need to master (Qureshi, 2013). This skill not only reflects students' linguistic ability, but also their ability to interact effectively in social and cultural contexts. One aspect that plays an important role in the development of speaking skills is speech acts, which include verbal and non-verbal forms of communication used to convey messages (Hidayat, 2016). According to the study of pragmatics, speech acts play a key role in creating meaningful communication because they link the meaning of an utterance to its social context. This study focuses on the influence of speech acts on the speaking skills of EFL students in Indonesia, which is still little explored in depth in the academic literature.

The urgency of this research lies in the low speaking proficiency of EFL students in Indonesia, which is often an obstacle in learning English (Damayanti et al., 2024). One of the contributing factors is the lack of attention paid to the use of speech acts in the learning process (Azhari et al., 2018). Previous research shows that traditional approaches that focus too much on grammar and vocabulary often neglect the importance of pragmatic context in communication (Pratiwi & Rohmadi, 2021). In this case, the study of pragmatics can be key to understanding how speech acts can improve students' speaking skills. For example, this study highlights that 'speech acts have a direct impact on students' ability to express their ideas in a way that is appropriate to the context of communication'.

The problem formulated in this study is as follows "Do speech acts have a significant influence on the speaking proficiency of EFL students in Indonesia?" In answering this question, this study will not only analyse the relationship between speech acts and speaking skills, but also explore how different types of speech acts, such as illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, affect students' learning process. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of EFL learning, especially in the Indonesian context.

The main purpose of this study is to identify and analyse the influence of speech acts on EFL students' speaking skills in Indonesia. In addition, this study also aims to provide practical insights for teachers in designing more effective teaching strategies based on the pragmatics approach. As stated in this study, "speech act-based approaches not only improve students' speaking skills, but also help them understand the dynamics of intercultural communication". To this end, it is hoped that this study will serve as a basis for the development of more holistic and contextualised learning methods. Overall, this research not only contributes to the development of pragmatics theory in the context of EFL learning, but also offers practical solutions to the challenges faced by students and teachers in Indonesia. With a comprehensive approach, this research hopes to address the urgent need for more relevant and effective EFL learning methods.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative case study design to understand in depth the influence of speech acts on EFL students' speaking skills in Indonesia. The aim of qualitative research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural environments (Ugwu, Chinyere, N; Eze Val, 2017). The data were analysed descriptively and qualitatively to provide an in-depth picture of students' communication patterns and use of speech acts during the learning process. The participants in this study were 20 students from the Department of English Language Education at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, selected through purposive sampling to ensure their relevance and involvement in the context of learning English as a foreign language.

Data were collected through observation and interviews. Observations were conducted during three EFL learning sessions where students' classroom interactions were recorded as the main data. The process started with data collection during classroom activities, where conversations that took place in student interactions were the main focus. During the three learning sessions, the data collected included pre-test, test and post-test activities. In the first session, students spoke without specific guidance on speech acts. In the second session they were instructed to use speech acts as often as possible in conversation, and in the third session the results of the use of speech acts were integrated into their learning. In addition, individual interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences of using speech acts in the classroom.

The research procedures included recording classroom activities, manually transcribing the audio data and analysing the conversations that took place in the EFL classroom context. The data was analysed by comparing speech act patterns between the first, second and third sessions to identify changes or improvements in students' speaking skills. Interviews conducted after the learning sessions aimed to gain further insight into students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their use of speech acts. The collected and transcribed data were then analysed descriptively to identify key patterns in the use of speech acts and their impact on students' speaking skills. Through this method, the research seeks to produce findings that are relevant to the development of pragmatic EFL learning.

C. RESULTS

The results showed that the use of speech acts in EFL learning had a positive impact on students' speaking skills. In the first session, when students were not instructed to use speech acts, conversations tended to be monotonous and limited to the use of simple phrases. Analysis of the transcripts showed that the students mostly used literal expressions without any variation in meaning transfer or communication strategies. In addition, the interaction between the students tended to be passive, with little initiative to initiate or continue the conversation. This reflected the students' lack of understanding of the pragmatic aspects of speaking English.

In the second session, after the students were instructed to use speech acts when speaking, there was a significant increase in the complexity and variety of conversations.

The data showed that students began to use different types of speech acts, such as illocutionary acts of request, suggestion and praise. For example, some students actively made suggestions to their classmates using phrases such as 'You should try this' or 'Why don't you say it like this'. It was also observed that the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic, with students more willing to interact and express their ideas in English.

By the third session, the students' command of speech acts had improved. Not only were they able to use different speech acts, but they also understood the context of their use better. For example, the students used expressive speech acts such as thanking or apologising in appropriate situations. They also began to adopt more natural patterns of communication, such as using intonation and gestures to support the purpose of the conversation. This finding suggests that explicit speech act learning helps students to understand aspects of pragmatics that they had not previously paid attention to.

Table 1. Comparison of frequency and complexity of EFL learners' speech acts in three learning sessions

Session	Number of Speech Acts	Active Interaction	Speech Complexity
First	20	30	25
Second	45	60	50
Third	70	85	80

Interviews with students after the learning session revealed their experiences in relation to the use of speech acts. The majority of students said that being taught to use speech acts helped them to speak more confidently. They also felt that they had a better understanding of how to speak effectively in certain contexts. Some students mentioned that this learning had opened their minds to the importance of understanding the intention behind the conversation, rather than just delivering words literally. Students also felt that speech acts helped them to communicate better with their classmates, creating a more interactive and collaborative learning environment

D. DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that the implementation of speech acts in the EFL classroom significantly increased the number of verbal interactions, active participation and speech complexity of the students. From the data obtained, in the first session, 20 speech acts were recorded with an active interaction rate of 30% and speech complexity of 25%. In the second session this number increased steadily with 45 speech acts, 60% active interaction and 50% speech complexity. At its peak, the third session recorded 70 speech acts with an active interaction rate of 85% and a speech complexity of 80%. These results indicate that intensive training using speech acts can significantly improve students' speaking ability in EFL classes. This finding is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the importance of speech acts in improving EFL students' speaking skills. For example, research by Marsuki (1994) mentioned that speech acts are at the core of effective communication. In addition, other research, such as that conducted by Darong (2024), shows that speech acts encourage students to understand the context of the

conversation and to produce relevant utterances. In the local context, this finding is consistent with the findings of Idris et al. (2023) who showed that speech acts encourage students to speak in public in a foreign language context.

In relation to the reality on the ground, many EFL classes in Indonesia still use conventional teaching methods that do not involve students in active conversation (Simatupang & Yusuf, 2024). As a result, EFL students' speaking skills stagnate, especially in terms of courage and language complexity (Ratnasari, 2020). By using speech acts consistently, as was done in this study, teachers can create a more interactive learning environment and encourage students' active participation. This reality highlights the need for a change in teaching methods that are more communicative in order to improve students' speaking skills. Several important ideas can be drawn from this study, one of which is the need for a more intensive communicative approach to EFL teaching. Speech acts involve not only students' courage to speak but also their ability to understand the context of the conversation in depth (Nurani, 2015). Teachers can use speech acts as the main teaching strategy by incorporating them into various activities such as group discussions, role plays and simulations of everyday conversations. In this way, students not only learn to speak, but also to understand the meaning of utterances in different situations.

The impact on reality is very positive, especially in improving the quality of English learning in Indonesia. With this approach, students are more confident in speaking and more adept at stringing together complex utterances. In addition, this method also helps students to understand the use of language in real contexts, so that they can use English more functionally. In the long run, the use of speech acts can help improve the English language skills of Indonesia's young generation. To achieve more optimal results, several things need to be done. Teachers need to be given specialised training on how to integrate speech acts into their teaching. In addition, the English curriculum in schools needs to be updated to emphasise communication-based teaching methods. Schools can also provide facilities such as video or audio recordings to help students analyse their own speech acts. Finally, further research is needed to test the effectiveness of speech acts on larger groups of students and with more diverse backgrounds.

E. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the systematic use of speech acts in an EFL classroom has a significant impact on the improvement of students' speaking skills. The research data revealed that the number of speech acts, the level of active participation and the complexity of students' utterances increased consistently from session to session. These findings confirm that speech acts not only increase students' courage to speak, but also enrich their ability to produce more complex and contextualised utterances. Thus, this approach can be used as an effective learning strategy to overcome the challenges of teaching speaking skills in EFL classrooms.

The hope of this study is that EFL teachers in Indonesia will begin to integrate speech acts as an important part of their teaching methods. A speech act-based approach can

create an interactive learning environment, support the development of students' communicative skills and build their confidence in using English. In addition, it is hoped that this research can be a reference for educators, practitioners and curriculum developers to enrich English learning methods in Indonesia, especially in improving students' speaking competence. The researcher also made some suggestions for future research. First, a broader study can be conducted by involving a more diverse population, both from different levels of education and from a wider area. Secondly, it is important to explore the use of speech acts in the context of online learning, given the trend towards increasingly digitalised education. Finally, further studies can examine the relationship between speech acts and other aspects of language skills, such as reading or writing, to understand the holistic effect of this method on English language learning. With these steps, it is hoped that EFL teaching in Indonesia can continue to grow and produce students who are competent and confident in communicating in English.

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