

Improving the Speaking Ability of the Eight-Grade Students of SMP Negeri Kota Baru through Pictures

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 05 March 2026	Speaking competence is an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables students to communicate ideas, exchange information, and participate actively in classroom interaction. However, many EFL learners experience difficulties in speaking because of limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, insufficient practice, and limited opportunities for meaningful communication. This study aims to examine students' speaking ability through the use of pictures as instructional media in an English classroom at SMPN Kota Baru. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative descriptive data. The participants were 20 eighth-grade students in the first semester. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, checklists, speaking tests, questionnaires, and photo-video documentation. Students' speaking performance was assessed based on pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The findings show that the students achieved a total score of 1,630, with an average score of 81.5. Based on the mastery classification presented in Table 1, nine students (45%) were categorized as excellent, while eleven students (55%) were categorized as good. No students were classified as fair, poor, or very poor. These results indicate that the students demonstrated a generally good level of English speaking ability when supported by pictures during speaking activities. The use of pictures provided students with visual prompts that helped them generate ideas and express information orally. Therefore, picture-based speaking activities can support students' participation and facilitate English speaking practice effectively. The study suggests that teachers can integrate pictures into speaking instruction to create more engaging and supportive classroom communication.
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1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the essential language skills used in everyday life. Speaking serves as a communication tool because communication is generally more effective when ideas are expressed orally. According to (Nurgiyantoro, 2010), speaking is an activity of producing acceptable language to convey ideas and messages to interlocutors while simultaneously receiving ideas and messages from them. Speaking skills should be possessed by every individual because they are fundamental to human communication. In educational settings, speaking enables learners to express their opinions, exchange information, participate in discussions, and develop interpersonal relationships, (Sunarti, 2024). Therefore, speaking competence is considered one of the primary indicators of successful language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

(Tarigan, 2015) suggests that speaking is the ability to pronounce articulated sounds or words to express, state, or convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Speaking is also one of the means through which individuals acquire knowledge. Similarly, (Nurgiyantoro, 2013) argues that speaking is the second language activity used by humans in everyday life after listening. People generally acquire language by first listening to the sounds of a language, then learning to pronounce them, and eventually becoming able to speak, (Hazimah et al., 2024). In the context of EFL learning, speaking is often regarded as the most challenging language skill because it requires learners to integrate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension simultaneously, (Qudratova, 2026). Unlike receptive skills, speaking demands immediate language production, which often causes students to experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of confidence when communicating in English. Consequently, many students hesitate to participate in classroom discussions despite having basic knowledge of English, (Almathkuri, 2025).

Speaking ability has a very important role in communication. Insufficient language proficiency may impede individuals' public speaking abilities, particularly in multilingual contexts (Dirgayasa, 2023). Speaking involves social interactions that require not only verbal communication but also paralinguistic and non-linguistic elements, such as intonation, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, (Kazanskaia, 2025). Therefore, speaking is important for students to practice their language competence, deepen their understanding, share ideas, and pronounce words accurately. In this process, students' motivation and interest play significant roles in facilitating meaningful learning (Tarigan, 2015). However, in reality, many students cannot maintain conversations because they lack vocabulary, ideas, and the ability to express their thoughts fluently while speaking. In addition, limited opportunities to practice English, teacher-centered instructional approaches, and the absence of engaging learning media often discourage students from actively participating in speaking activities, (Jamoom & Bahrón, 2024). As a result, students tend to become passive learners and rely heavily on their teachers rather than developing their communicative competence independently. For teachers, this situation presents a considerable challenge in encouraging students to speak confidently in the classroom without hesitation. Therefore, teachers are expected to implement innovative and interactive instructional strategies that create supportive learning environments where students have ample opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful communicative situations, (Esemuratova, 2025).

One instructional medium that has the potential to address these challenges is the use of cue cards. Card is one of the learning media to be used during speaking activities. It focuses on action exercises where students can actively participate and learn the content presented on the cue cards (Shabrina, 2014). This type of media is intended to improve students' willingness to speak in front of the classroom. Cue cards can be used in various ways, including individual work, pair work, and group work. They may consist of pictures or photographs accompanied by keywords or short phrases that serve as speaking prompts, (Sarmila et al., 2023).

Cue cards provide students with visual support and contextual clues that stimulate ideas

and facilitate language production, (Sabila et al., 2025). By presenting meaningful prompts, cue cards reduce students' cognitive burden because learners no longer need to generate ideas entirely on their own. Instead, they can concentrate on organizing their thoughts, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and expressing their ideas orally, (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2013). Furthermore, cue cards encourage communicative interaction, increase students' confidence, stimulate creativity, and promote active participation during speaking activities (*Motivasi Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Melalui Media Cue Card*, 2024). They are also practical, flexible, and adaptable instructional media that can be modified according to students' proficiency levels and learning objectives. Teachers can integrate cue cards into role plays, pair discussions, storytelling, interviews, and classroom presentations to provide students with repeated opportunities for authentic oral communication (Eshboyeva & Mamayusupova, 2026). It is supported by experts' opinions that cue cards are instructional media that help students perform speaking activities more effectively by providing meaningful guidance and reducing speaking anxiety.

Although numerous studies have investigated the use of instructional media to improve English speaking skills, studies focusing specifically on the implementation of cue cards in junior high school EFL classrooms remain relatively limited, particularly in the Indonesian context, (Muspira et al., 2025). Previous studies have generally reported positive effects of visual media on students' motivation and speaking performance; however, differences in learners' characteristics, classroom environments, and instructional practices necessitate further investigation (Wiharjo & Wiharjo, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of using cue cards to improve students' speaking skills. The findings of this study are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of cue cards as an instructional medium and offer practical implications for English teachers in designing more engaging, interactive, and student-centered speaking activities.

2. Method

The participants in this study were eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri Kota Baru who participated in English speaking activities during the teaching and learning process. The instruments used in this study consisted of an interview guideline, an observation sheet and checklist, a speaking rubric, and a questionnaire. The researcher also used a photo-video camera to document the teaching and learning process (Otrell-Cass et al., 2010). The interview guideline was used to obtain information from the English teacher regarding the students' speaking abilities, classroom conditions, teaching strategies, and challenges encountered during the learning activities. The observation sheet and checklist were employed to systematically record the teaching and learning process, particularly teacher-student and student-student interactions throughout the classroom activities (Ayunda et al., 2021). Teacher interaction referred to the teacher's role in delivering instructions, providing feedback, motivating students, and facilitating classroom communication, while student interaction focused on students' participation, responsiveness, collaboration, confidence, and engagement during speaking activities.

In addition, the speaking rubric was used to assess the students' speaking performance based on five aspects: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Hidayat et al., 2023). The questionnaire was administered to obtain students' responses and perceptions regarding the implementation of the teaching strategy and to identify their attitudes, motivation, and interest in learning speaking (Hsb et al., 2025). Furthermore, a photo-video camera was used to document the implementation of the research, providing visual evidence of classroom activities and supporting the validity of the observational data collected during the study (Bostic et al., 2021). The data obtained from the speaking rubric were analyzed descriptively to determine the students' scores and levels of mastery, while the observation, interview, and questionnaire data were used to provide supporting information

concerning students' participation and classroom interaction during the speaking activities.

3. Results

This study investigated classroom interaction between the teacher and students in an English language learning context at SMP Negeri Kota Baru. The research focused on one Grade VIII class during the first semester. Data were collected through video recording of the teaching and learning process on April 11, 2023, in accordance with the class schedule. The lesson focused on the topic of *jobs and professions*. The video recordings were subsequently analyzed to examine the students' speaking performance and level of mastery in the English learning activity.

Table 1. Students Answer

No.	Student's Initials	Score	Level of Mastery
1	S.B.	75	Fair
2	M.Y.N.H.	80	Good
3	K.A.	75	Fair
4	A.G.T.	80	Good
5	H.N.O.	75	Fair
6	M.A.T.	75	Fair
7	M.A.R.B.	85	Excellent
8	N.A.M.L.	80	Good
9	E.J.C.H.T.	80	Good
10	A.R.L.	80	Good
11	Y.W.N.	80	Good
12	F.U.	80	Good
13	A.A.K.	80	Good
14	A.F.R.N.	90	Excellent
15	M.S.M.	85	Excellent
16	B.F.M.	85	Excellent
17	L.A.K.	85	Excellent
18	R.M.A.	90	Excellent
19	A.N.	85	Excellent
20	M.A.K.	85	Excellent
Total		1,630	
Average		81.5%	

Table 1 presents the students' speaking test scores and their corresponding levels of mastery. The results show that the students obtained scores ranging from 75 to 90, with an overall average score of 81.5. Of the 20 students, 11 students obtained scores within the Good category, while 9 students achieved the Excellent category. No students were classified below the Fair category. The highest score was 90, achieved by students with the initials A.F.R.N. and R.M.A., whereas the lowest score was 75, obtained by S.B., K.A., H.N.O., and M.A.T. These findings indicate that the majority of students demonstrated a relatively strong level of speaking performance in the English learning activity.

The average score of 81.5 indicates that the overall speaking ability of the students was categorized as Excellent based on the mastery classification used in this study. Although a considerable number of students were placed in the Good category individually, the overall class performance exceeded the threshold for the Excellent category. This finding suggests that most students were able to participate in the speaking activity and demonstrate adequate competence in using English to discuss the topic of jobs and professions.

Table 2. The Students level Mastery

NO	Range of Score	Total of Students	Students Number	Level of Mastery
1	81%-100%	9	2,7,19,15,16,17,18,19,& 20	Excellent
2	61%-80%	11	1,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,& 13	Good
3	41%-60%	-	-	-
4	21%-40%	-	-	-

Table 2 further categorizes the students according to their score ranges. The results indicate that 9 students (45%) achieved scores within the 81%–100% range and were therefore classified as Excellent. Meanwhile, 11 students (55%) obtained scores within the 61%–80% range and were categorized as Good. No students obtained scores within the Fair, Poor, or Very Poor categories. Therefore, all 20 students achieved at least the Good level of mastery, demonstrating that the students generally possessed adequate speaking ability in the English learning activity.

The distribution of scores indicates that the students' speaking performance was concentrated in the Good and Excellent categories. The fact that 45% of the students reached the Excellent category and 55% reached the Good category demonstrates a generally positive level of achievement. Furthermore, the absence of students in the lower mastery categories indicates that the students were able to meet the expected learning outcomes in the speaking activity.

Table 3 Shows that there are 9 students were categorized, 11 students were categorized excellent students are categorize good, and no one students get fair level poor level and very poor in the test. Based on the data in table 1 the students answer in test two speaking test categorized is excellent it is proved by the fact that 9 students of SMPN Kota Baru get Excellent total of aspect. The students' scores in the speaking ability test based on five assessment aspects: fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, and pronunciation.

Table 3. Score of Students in Speaking Ability in Speaking Test

NO	NAME	F	V	C	G	P	Score	Level
1	SB	15	10	15	20	15	75	Fair
2	MH	10	20	15	25	10	80	Good
3	KA	10	20	15	20	10	75	Fair
4	PT	15	25	15	10	15	80	Good
5	HO	10	20	15	20	10	75	Fair
6	MT	15	25	10	15	10	75	Fair
7	MB	20	15	25	10	15	85	Excellent
8	NL	10	15	20	10	25	80	Good
9	ET	20	10	15	20	15	80	Good
10	AL	15	15	20	10	20	80	Good
11	YN	10	25	15	20	10	80	Good
12	FU	15	15	25	10	15	80	Good
13	AK	25	10	15	20	10	80	Good
14	AN	20	15	15	25	15	90	Excellent
15	MM	10	20	15	25	15	85	Excellent
16	BM	20	10	15	20	20	85	Excellent
17	LK	20	15	10	25	15	85	Excellent
18	RA	15	20	15	25	15	90	Excellent
19	AN	10	25	15	20	15	85	Excellent
20	MK	20	15	15	25	10	85	Excellent

Average Score		305	345	320	375	285	81.5	Excellent
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Note:

- V = Vocabulary
 F = Fluency
 C = Comprehension
 G = Grammar
 P = Pronunciation

The results show that the students obtained scores ranging from 75 to 90, with an overall average score of 81.5, which was categorized as Excellent. The highest scores were obtained by students with the initials AN and RA, who each achieved a score of 90, while the lowest score of 75 was obtained by SB, KA, HO, and MT. In terms of the individual assessment aspects, grammar obtained the highest total score of 375, followed by vocabulary with 345, comprehension with 320, fluency with 305, and pronunciation with 285. These results indicate that the students demonstrated relatively strong grammatical ability and vocabulary knowledge in their speaking performance. However, pronunciation and fluency received comparatively lower scores, suggesting that these aspects still require further improvement. Regarding the level of mastery, four students were categorized as Fair, nine students as Good, and seven students as Excellent. The findings indicate that most students demonstrated good to excellent speaking ability after the learning activities. Overall, the results suggest that the students were able to communicate orally with adequate vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation, although greater attention to fluency and pronunciation could further enhance their speaking performance.

4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Grade VIII students of SMP Negeri Kota Baru generally possessed good to excellent speaking ability. The class average of 81.5 suggests that the students were able to perform the speaking task with an adequate level of competence. Their performance may be associated with their participation in classroom interaction, in which students had opportunities to respond to questions, express ideas, and use English related to the topic being discussed.

The results also suggest that classroom interaction played an important role in supporting students' speaking performance. Through interaction with the teacher and their classmates, students were provided with opportunities to practice vocabulary and construct spoken responses in English. The topic of jobs and professions also provided a familiar and contextualized subject for students to develop their speaking performance. Such interaction can encourage students to actively participate in the learning process and provide opportunities to practice English in a meaningful context.

The distribution of students across the mastery levels further supports the positive findings. Eleven students were categorized as Good, while nine students were categorized as Excellent. Importantly, none of the students were classified in the Fair, Poor, or Very Poor categories. This indicates that the students had achieved a satisfactory level of speaking mastery. Nevertheless, the difference between students in the Good and Excellent categories suggests that individual students may still require different levels of support and opportunities for further speaking practice.

Overall, the findings indicate that the English classroom interaction observed in Grade VIII at SMP Negeri Kota Baru was accompanied by a relatively high level of student speaking performance. The average score of 81.5 and the distribution of students in the Good and Excellent categories demonstrate that the students were generally capable of communicating

in English at an appropriate level for the learning activity. Therefore, maintaining interactive classroom practices and providing students with continuous opportunities to speak may contribute to the development of their English speaking ability.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the Grade VIII students of SMP Negeri Kota Baru demonstrated a generally good to excellent level of English speaking ability. The students obtained scores ranging from 75 to 90, with an overall average score of 81.5, which was categorized as Excellent according to the mastery criteria applied in the study. Eleven students (55%) were categorized as Good, while nine students (45%) were categorized as Excellent. No students were classified in the Fair, Poor, or Very Poor categories in the overall level-of-mastery distribution. These results indicate that the students were generally able to perform speaking activities and communicate their ideas in English with an adequate level of competence.

The assessment of five speaking aspects showed that grammar received the highest total score, followed by vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. This finding suggests that the students demonstrated relatively strong grammatical knowledge and vocabulary use, while fluency and pronunciation remained areas that could be further developed through continuous speaking practice. Classroom interaction also provided students with opportunities to respond to the teacher, express ideas, practice vocabulary, and participate in meaningful communication related to the topic of jobs and professions.

Overall, the findings suggest that interactive English learning activities supported students' participation and speaking performance. The use of cue cards, together with teacher-student and student-student interaction, can provide useful support for encouraging students to express ideas and participate more actively in speaking activities. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to employ interactive and contextualized speaking activities and provide continuous opportunities for oral practice. Further studies involving larger groups, longer implementation periods, and more rigorous experimental designs are recommended to obtain stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of cue cards in improving students' speaking skills.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Emerensiana Yovita Luan: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Visualization, Writing-original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Febronia Lasi: Methodology, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing-review & editing.

Anselmus Sahan: Supervision, Validation, Resources, Writing-review & editing.

Statement of the Use of AI

AI tools were used for grammar checking and language editing during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors remain fully responsible for the content, interpretation of the findings, and conclusions presented in this article.

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