



The Talking Stick's Impact: A Study on Improving Second-Graders' English Speaking Skills

Chantika Mayang¹, Suparmi², Dania Rahma³, Alhusna Asma⁴

Universitas of Putra Indonesia
YPTK Padang, West Sumatra,
Indonesia^{1,2,3,4}

Email:

mayangchantika553@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Talking Stick method in improving the speaking skills of students at SMP N 2 Padang, addressing common issues like low proficiency, anxiety, and poor communication. Using a quantitative pre-experimental design, a single group of 32 students from class VIII.1 received a pre-test and a post-test. The results showed a significant improvement, with the average score increasing from 48.59 on the pre-test to 75 on the post-test. Statistical analysis confirmed this finding, as the calculated t-test value of 23.893 was significantly greater than the t-table value of 2.042, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a). The significance of these findings lies in their ability to provide empirical evidence that the Talking Stick method is a highly effective, data-backed tool for enhancing student speaking skills. This research offers a practical, actionable solution for teachers facing similar challenges in their classrooms and contributes to the existing body of literature by validating the method's effectiveness in a specific, localized context.

Keywords: *English Speaking Skills, Talking Stick Method, Junior High School Students, EFL Language Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a complex and fundamental skill in language learning, defined as an interactive process of creating and conveying meaning (Chaney, 1998). It is more than just producing correct sounds; it involves effectively communicating thoughts, emotions, and ideas in a manner that is both accurate and contextually appropriate (Brown & Yule, 1983). Therefore, developing strong speaking skills is crucial for students, as it empowers them to articulate their thoughts, engage in persuasive arguments, and participate confidently in academic and social discussions (Richards, 2008).

To effectively teach speaking, instructors must cultivate a supportive environment where students feel at ease expressing themselves. This can be achieved through a variety of interactive activities that provide ample opportunities for practice and constructive feedback (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Engaging methods such as role-playing, group discussions, and debates can help students improve their communication skills by focusing on key components like pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary (Rahayu, 2015). One such

innovative tool that can make this process more engaging and less intimidating is the Talking Stick method.

The Talking Stick method is a simple yet powerful technique that uses a stick or a similar object to regulate classroom discourse. As supported by various studies, this method has been shown to significantly reduce public speaking anxiety, especially for shy or introverted students (Rahayu, 2021). By granting the holder of the stick the sole right to speak, it gives students a clear and structured cue for when it is their turn, allowing them to prepare their thoughts and share their opinions without interruption. This approach fosters an environment of respectful listening and turns a simple object into a tool for dynamic collaboration, ensuring that every student has an equal opportunity to contribute (Puspitasari & Anggraeni, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of speaking skills and the availability of effective teaching methods, many students at SMPN 2 Padang continue to face significant challenges. Pre-observations conducted from July 23 to August 6, 2023, revealed several issues related to students' English-speaking proficiency. These challenges can be categorized into three main areas: First, students demonstrate a lack of opportunities to practice their speaking skills, a common problem in Indonesian EFL contexts (Setiyadi, 2016). This, combined with low self-confidence and a lack of exposure to authentic English, severely hinders their development. Second, a limited vocabulary prevents students from forming coherent sentences and expressing their ideas effectively. This aligns with research highlighting how insufficient vocabulary knowledge is a major barrier to speaking fluency, often causing students to fear making mistakes and lose interest in English (Schmitt, 2008). Lastly, a high level of speaking anxiety negatively impacts student performance. This anxiety interferes with their ability to think, recall information, and communicate effectively, further eroding their self-confidence in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Previous studies have consistently shown the Talking Stick method to be a valuable tool for improving speaking skills and reducing anxiety in language learners, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings (Rahayu, 2021; Puspitasari & Anggraeni, 2020). However, this research offers a unique and novel contribution by applying this method to a specific and underexplored context: the students at SMPN 2 Padang. By conducting a pre-observation, this study was able to identify and address a combination of specific, interconnected problems, a lack of speaking practice, limited vocabulary, and high levels of speaking anxiety that are prevalent in this particular student population. The study's use of a paired-sample t-test provides new empirical evidence that quantitatively proves the method's effectiveness in this unique setting. Thus, while building on the foundation of existing literature, this research fills a gap by providing a targeted, holistic solution and localized data to support the use of the Talking Stick method as a successful pedagogical approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Speaking Skill

Speaking skill is a fundamental aspect of effective communication that involves more than just producing sounds. It is an intricate process of expressing ideas, conveying information, and building connections with others. According to Rahmayanti et al. (2017), speaking is the ability to articulate sounds or words to convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings. This skill is essential for individuals to participate in conversations and presentations, as it enables

them to express themselves clearly and persuasively (Tarigan, 2015). A key goal in teaching speaking is to empower students to effectively communicate their ideas and knowledge to others. Qasypia (2020) further defines speaking as a communicative activity between a speaker and a listener, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the process. For successful communication, both parties must cooperate to prevent misunderstandings. Therefore, mastering speaking involves not only practicing articulation but also understanding the context and function of language.

b. Teaching Speaking

Teaching speaking refers to the pedagogical methods used to help learners develop their verbal communication abilities. As Setiawan et al. (2019) assert, teaching English as a foreign language requires effective strategies to achieve positive outcomes. The primary objective is to facilitate student learning by providing them with the necessary tools and encouragement to improve their performance. The ultimate goal of teaching speaking is communicative efficiency (Sholihah, 2016). This means students should be able to make themselves easily understood, effectively using their current proficiency while minimizing errors in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. Furthermore, teaching speaking involves helping students organize their thoughts logically and choose appropriate language for different social contexts, audiences, and situations. To achieve this, Brown & Lee (2015) recommend a variety of strategies, such as role-play, discussions, and presentations, alongside constructive feedback to help students correct errors. This highlights the need for teachers to be creative and adaptable in their approach to teaching speaking.

c. The Talking Stick Method

The Talking Stick method is a highly engaging teaching technique used to increase student participation and regulate speaking turns within a group. It is based on the use of a simple object, like a stick, that is passed from person to person. As Carol Locust (2010) explains, the student holding the stick is the only one who has the floor and is expected to answer questions or share their thoughts. This method is highly effective in promoting active involvement, as students must think quickly when it is their turn (Hamdani, 2022). Mulyatiningsih (2016) adds that this method fosters a collaborative atmosphere where every student is encouraged to contribute, making it particularly suitable for elementary school students. It can also be adapted to include educational consequences, such as singing or poetry, for students who cannot answer, thereby creating motivation to study harder. In essence, the Talking Stick method is a structured learning model that promotes disciplined turn-taking and active participation.

d. Teaching Speaking Using the Talking Stick Method

The Talking Stick method is a valuable tool for supporting English language instruction, offering a structured way to maintain student engagement and vary classroom activities. The procedure for its use can vary, but most models share core steps. Helman (2009) outlines a process that includes grouping students in circles, preparing materials like sentence frames or vocabulary lists, and establishing a clear rule that students can only decline a turn once. Students pass the stick, and the person holding it speaks on the topic, ensuring everyone gets a chance to practice. Similarly, Kagan (2009) describes a procedure where students use their sticks to contribute to a discussion, with the sticks being collected and redistributed to continue the conversation. Garrett (2014) provides a three-step process: starting with a circle and an initial greeting, allowing the stick holder to speak, and then laying the stick in the center of the circle for anyone to pick up and continue the discussion. These various approaches demonstrate the method's flexibility in providing a

structured and equitable way for all students to practice their speaking skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method to test the hypothesis that the Talking Stick method improves student speaking skills. This approach, grounded in the philosophy of positivism, was chosen for its ability to measure variables numerically and use statistical analysis to determine cause-and-effect relationships (Sugiyono, 2012; Creswell, 2014). The use of quantitative data ensures objective and accurate findings regarding the effectiveness of the intervention.

The study's design was a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. This involved a single group of 32 students from class VIII 1 at SMPN 2 Padang who served as the participants. They were selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure the sample was representative and to minimize selection bias (Sugiyono, 2012). The participants' speaking skills were measured using a pretest. They then underwent an intervention using the Talking Stick method, followed by a post-test to measure any changes. This design allowed the researcher to directly observe the impact of the method by comparing the students' scores before and after the intervention.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the pretest and post-test, along with a discussion of the results based on data analysis. The research was conducted over four meetings at SMP N 2 Padang with 32 students from class VIII 1 participating. The first meeting involved a pretest on factual recount text. The second and third meetings were for the treatment, which involved implementing the Talking Stick method. The final meeting was dedicated to a post-test to measure students' speaking skills after the intervention.

The primary finding of this study is the significant improvement in students' speaking skills after the Talking Stick intervention. Before the treatment, the average pretest score was 48.59, indicating that students faced difficulties with speaking, likely due to a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation challenges (Setiyadi, 2016). After the treatment, the average post-test score increased to 75, representing a substantial mean score increase of 26.41.

The statistical analysis using a paired-sample t-test further confirmed this improvement. The t-test value of 23.893 was significantly higher than the critical value of 2.042, with a significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.01, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. This result is statistically significant and led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a).

The findings strongly suggest that the Talking Stick method is a highly effective tool for enhancing students' speaking skills. The significant increase in the mean score and the statistically significant t-test result provide empirical evidence that this method can successfully address the difficulties students face in oral communication.

The observed improvement can be attributed to several factors inherent in the Talking Stick method. The structured, turn-taking nature of the activity likely reduced public speaking anxiety by giving every student a guaranteed chance to speak in a low-pressure environment (Rahayu, 2021). Additionally, the method encouraged active participation and engagement, directly addressing the students' aversions to speaking (Puspitasari & Anggraeni, 2020). The consistent practice during the treatment sessions helped students build confidence and fluency, while the use of specific materials like recount text provided

them with a clear context and purpose for their communication. These results align with previous studies that have also found the Talking Stick method to be beneficial for improving speaking skills and confidence in a classroom setting (Wiguna, 2018).

The significance of the findings lies in their ability to provide empirical evidence that the Talking Stick method is an effective and statistically proven tool for improving student speaking skills. This research validates a teaching method with quantitative data, moving beyond anecdotal evidence by showing a significant increase in the mean score from 48.59 to 75. This substantial improvement, backed by a strong statistical result ($t=23.893$), provides a concrete, data-driven justification for its use. Furthermore, the study offers a practical solution for teachers at SMP N 2 Padang and other similar schools, demonstrating how the method can directly address specific learning difficulties such as low confidence, limited vocabulary, and speaking anxiety. By creating a structured, low-pressure environment, the Talking Stick method encourages active participation and helps students overcome their aversions to speaking, thereby offering an actionable way to enhance oral communication skills in the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the Talking Stick method is a highly effective and valuable tool for enhancing the speaking skills of students. It can be confidently recommended as a pedagogical approach to improve oral communication in a classroom setting. The paired sample t-test analysis revealed a significant improvement in student speaking skills after the implementation of the Talking Stick method. The statistical findings, with a t-test value of 23.893 (which is greater than the critical value of 2.042) and a significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.01 (lower than the alpha level of 0.05), clearly show a strong effect. These results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a). This research is significant because it provides empirical evidence that the Talking Stick method is an effective and statistically proven tool for improving student speaking skills in a classroom setting.

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