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## Implementing Strategic Communication Training to Overcome Student's Speaking Difficulties in English Among Eight Grade Students at SMPN 1 Krejengan

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Strategic Communication Training, EFL Speaking, Strategic Competence, Junior High School, Speaking Anxiety.

### ABSTRACT

Many EFL students at the junior high school level struggle with communication breakdowns due to limited vocabulary and high anxiety, yet traditional speaking instructions often overlook the explicit teaching of strategic competence. This study aims to examine how Strategic Communication Training can help EFL students at SMPN 1 Kerejengan overcome speaking difficulties, focusing on improving their ability to manage communication breakdowns, enhance fluency, and increase confidence. This study employed a qualitative case study design, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Strategic Communication Training significantly improved students' speaking fluency, confidence, and interaction ability. Students demonstrated effective use of strategies such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, clarification requests, and confirmation checks. Classroom participation also increased through role-plays and group discussions, while students became more capable of maintaining conversations despite linguistic limitations and showed reduced speaking anxiety. This study is applicable in EFL classrooms, particularly in junior high schools and teacher education programs, providing practical insights for curriculum developers. The novelty of this study lies in integrating Strategic Communication Training into classroom-based speaking instruction, offering new insights into how strategic competence can enhance students' communicative proficiency and overall engagement in EFL learning.

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### Introduction

Mastering English, especially speaking, is a crucial skill for students in today's globalized world. Speaking is a crucial aspect of communication because it allows individuals to express ideas, views, and information effectively and efficiently in a variety of academic and social situations. Mastering English, especially speaking, is a crucial skill for students in today's globalized world. Speaking is a crucial aspect of communication because it allows individuals to express ideas, views, and information effectively and efficiently in a variety of academic and social situations.

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In the process of learning a foreign language, there are four core skills that need to be developed: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, speaking skills are often a major obstacle for those learning English as a foreign language (EFL), especially those who do not interact much with native speakers. Speaking skills are a productive skill that requires appropriate teaching methods for students to master them well (Hijazi, 2025).

Research conducted by (Tristasari, 2025) revealed that EFL students often face difficulties when speaking due to limited vocabulary, inaccuracy in pronunciation, and feelings of anxiety when communicating in the language they are learning. These findings emphasize that both psychological and linguistic factors contribute to students' poor speaking skills. Furthermore, (Melansari et al., 2025) explain that the lack of opportunities to practice speaking in the classroom is one of the main reasons why students are less willing to speak actively.

However, in practice, many junior high school students, particularly those at SMPN 1 Kerejengan, face challenges in mastering English speaking skills. They often exhibit a passive attitude when practicing speaking, feel a lack of confidence, and are afraid of making mistakes when asked to speak. This is caused by various factors, such as low motivation to learn, a lack of opportunities for sufficient speaking practice, and insufficiently creative teaching methods and minimal use of engaging learning media.

However, in practice, many junior high school students, particularly those at SMPN 1 Kerejengan, face challenges in mastering English speaking skills. They often exhibit a passive attitude when practicing speaking, feel a lack of confidence, and are afraid of making mistakes when asked to speak. This is caused by various factors, such as low motivation to learn, a lack of opportunities for sufficient speaking practice, and insufficiently creative teaching methods and minimal use of engaging learning media. (Bilak & Henrietta, 2024) emphasized that a good learning approach can create an interactive, communicative, and enjoyable learning environment, which makes students more motivated to practice speaking. Furthermore, (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023) stated that speaking instruction needs to provide a realistic context so students can apply their speaking skills through various activities such as role-playing, group discussions, presentations, and the use of digital media.

The disciplines of communication science and language acquisition offer a variety of new methods that can be used to improve students' speaking skills. (Sarifudin & Setyawan, 2025) explains that learning methods based on active communication and collaboration, such as role-playing, group discussions, and presentations, have proven effective in improving students' speaking fluency. This finding is supported by (Ningtyas & Amirudin, 2025) who revealed that a combination strategy. Namely, strategic communication training that includes repeated practice, constructive feedback, and the use of digital media can significantly increase students' confidence when speaking.

However, there is limited research implementing structured communication strategies in the context of junior high schools in Indonesia, particularly at SMPN 1 Kerejengan. Some studies emphasize only one technique for example, role-play, while others have not implemented integrated communication training that strategically encompasses all aspects

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of speaking skills. This situation highlights the need for innovative learning strategies that can increase student motivation and overcome various difficulties in speaking English.

Based on previous studies and the situation in the field, this research decided to use Strategic Communication Training as a comprehensive learning method. This training program will emphasize the development of effective communication strategies, including: interactive activities, consistent feedback, the use of digital media, and collaborative techniques such as discussions and presentations. It is hoped that the results of this study can have a positive impact on the development of students' speaking skills in various schools, including English learning practices at SMPN 1 Krejengan.

## **Research Methods**

According to (Kadasah et al., 2022), research techniques are a way to discover and seek tentative truth, not absolute truth. Scientific truths generated through research are open to testing, criticism, and even revision following developments in the field of science. Therefore, there is no single, absolute best research method, rather the method that best suits the objectives and phenomena being studied is chosen. (Adeoye, 2024), also states that the selection of research techniques must be tailored to the characteristics of the research to maximize the results and ensure their relevance to the problem being analyzed.

The type of research used in this paper is a case study. The case study method was chosen because the research objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of Strategic Communication Training in addressing students' speaking problems at SMPN 1 Kerejengan. The case study approach provides researchers with the opportunity to investigate phenomena within a real-life school context. Previous research related to communication strategies in teaching speaking has also utilized the case study approach to detail the strategies used by teachers and students' reactions to these strategies (Rasyid et al., 2023). Therefore, the data in this study were collected from various sources directly related to speaking learning activities, and the research results are only applicable to the context being studied.

The approach used in this study is qualitative. The qualitative method was chosen because the purpose of this study is to explain and analyze in depth how the implementation of Strategic Communication Training and its impact on students' speaking difficulties. In qualitative research, the data collected includes words, actions, and behaviors observed during the teaching process. Research related to communication strategies in the EFL context shows that a qualitative approach is effective for investigating how students use communication strategies to maintain fluency and overcome vocabulary problems and speaking anxiety (Alkhaldi et al., 2023). (Alkhaldi et al., 2023). The data obtained will then be transcribed, coded, and analyzed systematically to draw conclusions in accordance with the research objectives.

This research is a field study because it was conducted directly at SMPN 1 Kerejengan as the research location. Through on-site research, researchers were able to directly observe the English learning process, interactions between teachers and students, and the implementation of Strategic Communication Training in classroom speaking activities. By

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conducting an on-site study, researchers were able to collect real-world data that reflects the actual circumstances of students when facing speaking challenges and how communication strategies are applied to assist them.

The participants of this study consisted of English teachers, the school principal, and eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kerejengan. A total of 20 students, comprising 9 males and 11 females, participated in the Strategic Communication Training (SCT) sessions. The students were aged between 13 and 14 years old. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria. The eighth-grade students were chosen because they had transitioned to more interactive speaking activities, yet they demonstrated noticeable speaking difficulties, vocabulary limitations, and speaking anxiety during preliminary observations. Out of the total 20 students, 5 students were selected for structured interviews to gain deeper, individualized insights into their speaking experiences. Additionally, the English teacher was selected because they directly implemented the training, and the principal was included to provide an institutional perspective on the school's English learning support.

Data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe the speaking learning process in the classroom, including student engagement, self-confidence levels, and communication methods employed during speaking activities. The observation checklist was designed based on classroom interaction categories, specifically tracking student engagement, the types of communication strategies utilized, and teacher-student feedback during the speaking activities. Observations in research on communication strategies aim to identify interaction patterns and types of strategies that emerge during learning activities (Vale & Barbosa, 2023). In addition, structured interviews were conducted with English teachers, several eighth-grade students, and the principal to obtain in-depth information about the speaking challenges faced by students and the effectiveness of the Strategic Communication Training. The interview questions were developed by adapting the communication strategy framework proposed by (Dörnyei, 1995), which has been widely validated in recent EFL speaking studies (Islam et al., 2022), focusing on students' speaking challenges and their responses to the training. During the data collection process, an iPhone 11 smartphone was utilized both for recording interview audio and for capturing visual documentation of classroom activities. The interviews aimed to explore the research subjects' views and experiences regarding the strategies implemented. Documentation techniques were also applied by collecting supporting documents such as lesson plans, syllabi, grade lists, photographs of learning activities, and other academic records related to speaking learning.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation techniques, comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. Triangulation is used in communication strategy research to strengthen the validity of findings by examining phenomena from multiple perspectives (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). This ensures the credibility and consistency of the data obtained. To establish rigorous trustworthiness procedures, the study prioritized credibility through prolonged field

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engagement and persistent observations. Dependability was maintained by creating an audit trail of raw data, field notes, and interview transcriptions, ensuring the research process remains transparent and verifiable.

The data processing technique in this study uses an interactive analysis approach that includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The collected data are then filtered by selecting information that aligns with the research focus, namely the application of Strategic Communication Training in addressing students' speaking problems. Furthermore, the data are presented in a structured descriptive narrative format to help researchers see patterns and interrelationships between findings. The final step is drawing conclusions based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out continuously throughout the research process. This analysis model is commonly used in qualitative research that explores communication strategies and speaking difficulties in the context of teaching English as a foreign language.

## Findings

Based on data triangulated from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, the implementation of Strategic Communication Training (SCT) demonstrated a positive effect on the speaking performance of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kerejengan. To detail these improvements systematically, the findings are organized into themes tracking the transition from students' initial speaking difficulties to their strategic responses after the training.

### *1. Pre-Training Speaking Difficulties and Baseline Performance*

Before the Strategic Communication Training was implemented, a pre-test was administered to the 20 eighth-grade students to assess their baseline oral proficiency. The quantitative results showed that the overall average score for students' speaking skills was only 64.2. The detailed breakdown of the pre-test scores across four assessment aspects is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Speaking Ability Test Results Before Implementing Strategic Communication Training

<b>Assesment Aspect</b>	<b>Average Score</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Fluency</b>	61	Students' still experience difficulties and often when speaking.
<b>Vocabulary Mastery</b>	63	The vocabulary used is small and often repeats the same words.
<b>Pronunciation</b>	66	Pronunciation errors still occur frequently.
<b>Confidence</b>	57	Many students' feel emberrssed and afraid of making mistakes.

The low confidence (57) and fluency (61) reflected in Table 1 were strongly visible during classroom observations. The researcher's field notes revealed that during conventional speaking activities, a majority of the 20 students avoided eye contact with the teacher, looked down at their desks, and remained silent for long periods when prompted to speak in English. Communication often stopped entirely because students did not know how to compensate for forgotten words.

This observational evidence was further corroborated by the participant voices gathered during structured interviews. For instance, when asked about their primary challenge in speaking English before the training, Student 2 stated:

*"I actually know what to say in Indonesian, but in English, I immediately go blank because I am afraid of making grammar mistakes and forgetting the vocabulary, so I prefer to just stay silent."*

## **2. Post-Training Strategic Responses and Improved Performance**

To address these baseline difficulties, the students were exposed to Strategic Communication Training (SCT) for a semester. Students were taught specific achievement strategies such as approximation (using a close word), circumlocution (describing the object), and non-linguistic signals (mime/gestures) to keep the conversation flowing.

Following the training, a final post-test was conducted to evaluate progress. The overall average score increased significantly by 14 points, rising from 64.2 to 78.2. The improved performance across all parameters is detailed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Speaking Ability Test Results After Implementing Strategic Communication Training

<b>Assesment Aspect</b>	<b>Average Score</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Fluency</b>	76	Students are more fluent and able to maintain conversations.
<b>Vocabulary Mastery</b>	78	More varied and contextual vocabulary
<b>Pronunciation</b>	79	Pronunciation is clearer and more understandable
<b>Confidence</b>	80	Students are more confident and active in speaking

The remarkable jump in confidence (from 57 to 80) and fluency (from 61 to 76) shown in Table 2 was clearly manifested in classroom behaviors. During post-training observations, the researcher noted a vibrant classroom atmosphere. When students encountered a vocabulary gap, instead of freezing or staying silent, they successfully applied SCT techniques. For example, when a student forgot the word 'refrigerator', they actively used circumlocution by saying 'the cold box for food' combined with hand gestures.

During the post-intervention interviews, the participants expressed immense relief and satisfaction with their new coping mechanisms. Student 5 shared:

*"Now when I forget an English word, I don't immediately give up or stay silent. I try to explain it using other words or body gestures, and it turns out the teacher still understands. That makes me more courageous to speak"*

The English teacher also confirmed the transformative impact of the training during the final interview session:

*"The SCT changed their mindset. They finally realized that communication is not about perfect grammar, but about getting the message across. Their fluency improved because they learned how to survive in a conversation."*

## **Discussion**

This discussion critically analyzes the research findings regarding the implementation of Strategic Communication Training (SCT) in overcoming students' speaking difficulties at SMPN 1 Kerejangan. Rather than merely restating the numerical increases, this section interprets the underlying mechanisms of the training by referencing strategic communication theory, self-efficacy principles, and contemporary empirical evidence.

### **1. Theoretical Mechanisms: Why SCT Worked**

The substantial jump in students' fluency and confidence scores begs a critical question: *why did SCT work so effectively in this classroom?* From a theoretical standpoint, conventional EFL methods often impose a high cognitive load on students by demanding simultaneous mastery of perfect syntax, precise vocabulary, and accurate pronunciation. This demand frequently triggers what Student 2 described as "blanking out" and freezing.

SCT successfully bypassed this linguistic bottleneck by shifting the students' cognitive paradigm from grammatical perfection to communicative survival. This shift aligns with communication strategy theory as advanced by (Diobi & Nashruddin, 2023), which posits that language learners utilize strategic competence to bridge the gap between their communicative intent and their limited linguistic resources. By explicitly teaching achievement strategies such as circumlocution (e.g., describing a 'refrigerator' as 'the cold box for food') and non-linguistic signals, the training reduced the students' immediate performance anxiety. Instead of experiencing communication breakdowns when encountering a vocabulary gap, students possessed the practical tools to negotiate meaning dynamically.

Furthermore, the integration of interactive tasks like role-playing and conversation simulations altered the psychological atmosphere of the classroom. Grounded in self-efficacy theory (Bhati & Sethy, 2022), a student's willingness to speak is heavily governed by their belief in their capability to execute the action. As students repeatedly practiced these coping mechanisms and realized that the teacher and their peers could still comprehend their message despite structural errors, their self-efficacy strengthened. Consequently, as validated by (Aini et al., 2022), providing students with systematic tools to navigate communicative failures directly defuses speaking anxiety and unlocks spontaneous oral participation.

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## ***2. Contextual Influences and Empirical Synthesis***

The success of this intervention cannot be separated from the specific contextual factors of SMPN 1 Kerejengan. As a suburban/rural junior high school in Indonesia, students suffer from a severe lack of English exposure outside the school environment. In this context, English is strictly viewed as an academic subject rather than a tool for live interaction. Therefore, the implementation of an immersive, practice-intensive environment (Aziz, 2024) was vital.

The findings of this study strongly support previous literature while simultaneously extending their boundary conditions. The marked improvements in oral fluency and strategic survival corroborate the findings of (Rizqiyanti, 2023), who argued that strategic training prolongs the duration of student talk and enhances conversational maintenance. It also aligns with (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2023) regarding the power of structured strategic frameworks in lowering affective filters.

However, this study also encountered critical localized challenges that complement the warnings of (Alasmari & Althaqafi, 2024). The varying baseline proficiencies among the 20 students meant that low-achieving students required significantly higher teacher scaffolding and longer processing times to grasp abstract strategies like paraphrasing. This highlights a critical contextual reality: while SCT is universally powerful, its classroom success is highly dependent on the teacher's classroom management efficiency and the availability of unhurried, iterative practice time.

## **3. The Unique Contribution of the Study**

While prior studies on communication strategies have frequently focused on tertiary education or advanced language learners (Rybchynska, 2023), the unique contribution of this study lies in its empirical validation of SCT at the early junior high school level within a rural Indonesian EFL context.

At this developmental stage, students are undergoing a fragile transition from memorizing basic vocabulary words to executing spontaneous, paragraphs-long interactive conversations. This study proves that strategic competence should not be reserved as an advanced skill for fluent speakers; rather, it must be introduced early as a foundational "survival kit" for beginner learners. By demonstrating that 13-to-14-year-old students can consciously deploy circumlocution and gestures to maintain communication, this paper challenges traditional curriculum designs that prioritize grammar drills over strategic competence. It offers a practical model showing how public school teachers can foster global 21st-century communication skills (Amrullah & Zuhriyah, 2025) even within resource-constrained and low-exposure classrooms.

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## Conclusion

The objectives of this study are successfully accomplished by demonstrating that the use of strategic communication training effectively overcomes students' speaking difficulties at SMPN 1 Kerejengan. The results show that strategies such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, requesting explanations, and checking evidence are the key tools that help students maintain communication when they face speaking difficulties.

This success is achieved because strategic learning transforms the learning environment into a more interactive, communicative, and student-centered environment. By providing students more opportunities to practice speaking actively through activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and live conversation simulations, the study directly results in improved fluency, the ability to convey ideas, and the ability to use alternative strategies when communication barriers arise.

Furthermore, the research goal of improving student attitude is met as communication strategy training not only improves linguistic skills but also significantly increases students' self-confidence. They become more confident in speaking and less afraid of making mistakes because they now possess the tools to overcome them. Therefore, the improvement in students' speaking skills proves that the study has successfully reached its targets, which are not only seen academically but also reflected in changes in attitudes, active engagement, and psychological readiness to speak English.

In conclusion, the objectives are fully realized through active student engagement, consistent strategy practice, and the teacher's role in providing guidance. The results of this study confirm that a strategic and communicative approach is the necessary solution to provide students with authentic communication skills.

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