

A Pragmatic Approach In Teaching Speaking Skills for Vocational High School Students

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Submission Track:

Received: March 28, 2023

Revised: June 20, 2023

Accepted: June 22, 2023

Keywords:

Pragmatic approach, speaking ability, vocational school

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Abstract: English proficiency is essential for international communication and is highly valued in the industrial world. However, vocational school students often struggle with their English-speaking abilities. To address this issue, a pragmatic approach to English language teaching is proposed. Pragmatics focuses on effective communication by considering cultural contexts and is believed to enhance speaking skills. The study utilizes a case study approach in two vocational schools, collecting data from students and teachers through questionnaires and interviews. The findings reveal differences in perceptions between teachers and students, highlighting the students' lack of understanding of teaching activities. The pragmatic approach is seen as a solution to improve students' speaking skills by incorporating language theories into real-life contexts. The study suggests the importance of teacher preparation, comprehensible instruction, and alignment of perceptions between teachers and students for effective teaching of speaking skills. The implementation of the pragmatic approach can be achieved by integrating comprehension of language structures and content, setting specific targets, and utilizing appropriate teaching materials.



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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in human communication, enabling us to express ideas, knowledge, and emotions. Among the various languages spoken worldwide, English has emerged as a popular and essential language for international communication, often referred to as the global language. As an international commodity, English is widely used in globalization, international trade, media, and various aspects of modern life. Consequently, there is a growing motivation to learn English, and it is taught at different educational levels, including vocational schools, to prepare the younger generation for the challenges of the globalized world.

English proficiency has become a significant requirement in the recruitment process for many companies in Indonesia, as it facilitates access to vast amounts of information. Therefore, the ability to speak English is considered a crucial language competency in today's industrial world, particularly for vocational school students. Communicative Competence and Performance, as defined by (Chomsky, 1965), emphasize the importance of language knowledge and skills in effective communication. This includes a student's

understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts.

However, vocational school students often face challenges in their English-speaking abilities. They may lack an understanding of native speaker communication patterns, leading to doubts and hesitations when speaking English. Additionally, their knowledge of conversational context and linguistic systems may be limited, which is reflected in their low speaking proficiency scores.

To address these issues, this study adopts a pragmatic approach to English language teaching in vocational schools. Pragmatics, a field of study that interprets the meaning and situation of utterances within the context, focuses on effective communication by considering cultural contexts. By incorporating pragmatics into English language instruction, this study aims to enhance vocational school students' speaking skills and identify specific aspects of speaking that can be improved through this approach.

Several experts have discussed the significance of pragmatics and its integration into language teaching. (Kaswanti Purwo, 1990) argues that pragmatics and communicative approaches share similarities, with pragmatics being an integral part of communicative language teaching. (Gunawan, 1994) emphasizes that pragmatics investigates the intentions behind utterances. Furthermore, (Thomas, 1995) defines pragmatics as the ability to communicate effectively by incorporating knowledge of grammar structures.

As English continues to serve as a global language, connecting people worldwide, the importance of pragmatics becomes evident. English users must possess pragmatic competence to avoid inaccuracies and misunderstandings during communication. Pragmatic competence involves analyzing language consciously and constructing accurate and contextually appropriate speech.

Therefore, this article aims to explore the effectiveness of a pragmatic approach to English language instruction in vocational schools and identify specific aspects of speaking that can be enhanced through this approach. By incorporating pragmatics into language teaching, we can address the challenges vocational school students face in their English-speaking skills, promoting effective communication and preparing them for the demands of the industrial world.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Speaking Skills According to Linguists

Speaking skills refer to the active productive ability in language use. (Gillian Brown and George Yule, 1983) Speaking is the ability to pronounce the sounds of language to express or convey thoughts, ideas or feelings orally. There are two approaches used in defining speaking skills, namely the bottom-up and top-down approaches.

The bottom-up approach, advocated by (Bygate, 1987) refers to the motor skills and auditory signal production that generate verbal responses from the listener. This approach begins instruction by teaching sounds, words, and sentences before moving on to discourse. However, this approach is considered to pay less attention to the interactive and social aspects of speaking.

The top-down approach, embraced by (Nunan, 1989) and his supporters (Eckard & Kearny, 1981), (Florez, 1999) dan (Howarth, 2001), views speaking as an interactive process

involving the communication of ideas, information, or emotions between the speaker and the listener. This approach encourages learners to engage in discourse from the outset.

Speaking skills involve reproducing sounds and articulation to convey messages to others. Additionally, speaking skills also involve confidence and overcoming psychological issues such as shyness or speech anxiety. Speaking skills are also influenced by the communicative context, including participants, the physical environment, and the speaking purpose. (Richards and Rodgers, 2014) Mastery of English speaking skills is a top priority for second and foreign language learners. Frequently recurring language functions in specific discourse situations can be identified.

In teaching speaking skills, it is important to understand the underlying language competence and structures that support speaking skills. Proficiency in speaking English is prioritized in second language or foreign language learning. The components supporting speaking skills can be described using (Lier, 1995), which includes grammar components, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and communicative context.

Ability to Communicate in English for Non-Native Speakers

(Effendy, 1999) communication derives from the Latin word "communication," which means shared meaning. The process of communication involves the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages between a sender and receiver (Arni, 2000). Language is a system of sounds and words used by humans to express thoughts and feelings (Hornby, 1995). In communication, language can be divided into spoken and written language (Jendra, 2007).

Communication has essential components such as the sender, message, channel, receiver, and feedback (Arni, 2000). The success of communication is also determined by the effectiveness and appropriateness of the message (Rickheit, G. & Strohner, 2008). (Canale, M. and Swain, 1980) mention that communicative competence consists of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies.

Good understanding and listening skills are also crucial factors in communication. Body gestures in non-verbal communication also play a significant role in conveying thoughts and feelings.

Speaking Skill

According to Nadler (cited in Satria, 2008) speaking ability is defined as an activity that requires practice and is implied through practical activities. (Sanjaya, 2011) States that speaking ability or skills refer to the competence in completing tasks. (Rahmawati, 2016) emphasizes that speaking is a means of communication, allowing individuals to express their thoughts to others. (Wendra, 2008) defines speaking as the skill of conveying messages through oral language.

These viewpoints collectively suggest that speaking is a crucial element in communication, involving verbal expression and the ability to convey ideas, feelings, opinions, and more. Speaking skills are learned and developed through practice, and they significantly influence the quality of one's communication with others.

Speaking Skill Teaching Method

The teaching methods for speaking skills play a crucial role in developing students' speaking abilities. According to Taringan in (Ainur dan Agung, 2015) teaching speaking should focus on the use of language, not just its rules. Several effective teaching methods for developing speaking skills include conversation, interview, discussion, retelling, drama, speech, and debate.

In conversation, students engage in exchanging thoughts or opinions with other speakers, which enhances their speaking skills. The interview method involves interaction between speakers and interviewees, both in everyday contexts and educational settings. Discussion allows students to interact and exchange information to solve problems or discuss specific topics.

The retelling model involves students in constructing their own sentences and narratives to retell what they have understood, thus training them to speak independently. Drama allows students to engage in role-playing and language-based activities, enhancing their speaking skills.

Speech serves as a method to train oral communication skills, involving techniques such as impromptu speaking, memorization, script-based delivery, and extemporaneous speaking. Debate involves communication processes that defend opinions through convincing arguments. Students can learn to develop speaking strategies and persuade other participants in a debate.

These methods are supported by experts such as (Greene and Petty, 1987), (David A. Male, 1970), and (Laksono, 2003). They provide insights and explanations that support the effectiveness of these teaching methods for speaking skills. By applying these methods, students can enhance their speaking abilities, become more critical, understand the content they convey, and become proficient public speakers.

Pragmatic Approach in Teaching Speaking

In teaching speaking, the pragmatic approach is utilized by teachers to train students in practical speaking practices to enhance their speaking abilities. This approach instructs students to use language expressions or phrases that are appropriate to the given conditions and situations of communication. Through the pragmatic approach, students have the opportunity to directly apply the language theories they have learned, both orally and in writing, in relevant contexts. According to Levinson as cited in (Nababan, 1987), pragmatics is the study of the relationship between language and context.

The pragmatic approach in teaching speaking focuses on teaching speaking skills through context. This approach is considered effective as students practice language structures by understanding practical conditions that involve factors beyond language, which provide meaning. The pragmatic approach, which considers external factors, is believed to assist students in applying language theories and structures practically in real-life situations (Al-Pansori, 2016). Factors such as speaker, purpose, context, and medium influence the choice of words in communication, hence it is important to direct the process of teaching speaking in schools.

METHOD

This research utilized a case study approach with two vocational schools as the research sites. The problem investigated was students' speaking skills in these schools. The participants included students from grades X, XI, and XII, as well as English teachers. The research instruments used were questionnaires and interviews. Data were collected from 20 students and one teacher from each school. This case study research has implications for policy, procedures, and future research. The pandemic situation affected the distribution of instruments, both online and offline. Speaking competencies were assessed through observation and previous tests. The research was conducted in two vocational schools in the Banten Province, aiming to enhance students' communication skills in the workplace through the use of a pragmatic approach. The participants consisted of 20 students and one English teacher from each school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The condition of teachers and students in KBM

According to finding in table 1 below shows the differences in responses between teachers and students regarding the elements of teacher preparation, teaching implementation, and students' speaking abilities. Although the questionnaire items given to students and teachers were the same, both parties provided different answers to these questions.

Table 1. The comparison of results between the teacher observation sheet and the student questionnaire indicates variations in the responses.

No	Jenis pengambilan data	Frekuensi terbanyak (ya/ setuju)	Butir soal ke-
1	Lembar observasi guru	13	1 a,b,c,d; 2 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h; 3 b
2	Lembar kuesioner siswa	5	2 b,c,d,e; 2 h

The difference in responses between teachers and students indicates that students do not fully understand the preparation done by teachers, resulting in a lack of comprehension of the learning objectives. The research findings suggest that students' lack of understanding of teaching activities leads to low interest and motivation in learning English. This is evident in the students' responses to questions 3c and 3d of the questionnaire, despite their understanding of the language used and equal opportunities to speak in questions 3a, 3b, and 3e. The comparison between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding students' learning abilities reveals a similar perception of students' engagement in speaking and their low interest and motivation.

Conditions of teachers and students in teaching and learning using a pragmatic approach

According to finding table no 2 below shows the various questions in the teacher and student questionnaire with a pragmatic approach.

Table 2. the responses from teachers and students on the questionnaire with regards to the pragmatic approach

No	Jenis lembar kuesioner	Butir soal dengan jawaban skala yang sama	Butir soal dengan jawaban skala yang beda
1	guru	1a,b,e; 2a; 3 d,e,f	1 c,d; 2 b,c; 3 a,b,c, g
2	siswa		

The research findings indicate that understanding words, phrases, and vocabulary in conversations between teachers and students is considered moderately challenging, with an average score of 3 (neutral). However, there is a difference of opinion between teachers and students regarding their understanding of sentence structure and grammar. Teachers believe that students have a reasonably good understanding with an average score of 3, while students feel that their understanding is still not adequate, with an average score of 2. This highlights the need for focused teaching and learning to improve speaking skills for vocational students. Additionally, teachers emphasize the importance of using teaching materials such as textbooks or student worksheets as learning aids at home, especially during remote learning situations. Students face challenges such as limited direct interaction with teachers and technical issues like weak signals and unclear audio recordings.

Preparation of learning patterns for speaking skills with a pragmatic approach for vocational students

The research findings indicate that the implementation and evaluation of the curriculum in vocational English language learning have not been fully optimized by both teachers and students. It highlights the importance of teaching speaking skills using a pragmatic approach, especially for vocational students in Information Technology and Hospitality fields, as these skills are crucial for their future careers.

The study identifies key aspects for effective teaching of speaking skills using the pragmatic approach, including teacher preparation, comprehensible instruction, and alignment of perceptions between teachers and students regarding learning objectives, content, activities, and assessment. When there is a shared understanding of these aspects, both teachers and students can evaluate their progress during the teaching and learning process.

The research also reveals that students' low interest and motivation in using English for communication during classroom activities is a common issue, despite having equal opportunities to speak and some level of language understanding. Teachers' observations and questionnaire responses indicate that students lack understanding of the language used in classroom activities.

To address these findings, teachers are recommended to incorporate the pragmatic approach into their teaching materials and instructional media. This involves integrating comprehension of sentences and grammar used in conversations, emphasizing understanding of conversation content, and setting targets for vocabulary mastery, language structure accuracy, comprehension of intended meaning, and fluency in appropriate contexts.

By utilizing the theoretical framework of the pragmatic approach, these strategies can be implemented as part of the curriculum, considering government guidelines. They can be included as teaching materials and instructional tools, focusing on vocabulary and conversation content. When applied effectively, the pragmatic approach helps students understand, differentiate, and use language in daily conversations, supporting their language learning journey.

The results of this study indicate that language teaching with a pragmatic approach in this vocational school is still limited to the use of pragmatics as a teaching tool and has not been incorporated into the curriculum or taught as part of the instructional materials. Learning speaking skills with a pragmatic approach is crucial for students and should be understood as both instructional content and a learning medium.

CONCLUSION

In the teaching and learning process (KBM), there are several conditions that affect both teachers and students. Teachers possess a good understanding of the revised 2013 curriculum and carry out effective preparation and implementation of instruction, including the appropriate use of teaching media. However, an issue arises when students exhibit low interest and motivation in using English during KBM. Furthermore, there are perceptual differences between teachers and students regarding instructional preparation and students' understanding of KBM, as well as their speaking abilities.

To improve the KBM conditions, a pragmatic approach can be employed. Although students' language proficiency is still lacking, both teachers and students share the perception that students' speaking skills are inadequate in terms of accuracy in language structure, intelligence in responding, and fluency. However, there are disparities in the perception between teachers and students regarding the suitability of texts and contexts, adequacy of vocabulary, and comprehension of situational contexts in conversations.

Both teachers and students agree that students still face difficulties in comprehending the linguistic forms used in conversations. Therefore, concrete steps are required to actively engage students in KBM, enhance their motivation, and provide instruction that is more tailored to their needs.

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