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### Strategies in Teaching English Speaking Skills in Grade 7 of Junior High Schools in Rural Areas

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**Abstrak** – Keterampilan berbicara merupakan salah satu aspek penting dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, terutama bagi siswa di daerah pedesaan yang sering menghadapi hambatan seperti keterbatasan fasilitas, rendahnya motivasi, dan minimnya paparan Bahasa Inggris di luar kelas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan strategi yang digunakan guru dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara Bahasa Inggris pada siswa kelas tujuh di SMPN 1 Sekar dan SMPN 2 Gondang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan berbagai strategi seperti role-play, diskusi kelompok, dan storytelling untuk mendorong siswa aktif berbicara. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan akses internet dan fasilitas belajar yang kurang memadai, guru tetap berinovasi agar pembelajaran berlangsung secara efektif. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa strategi yang diterapkan mampu meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan kemampuan berbicara siswa, meskipun diperlukan dukungan lebih lanjut agar proses pembelajaran semakin optimal.

**Kata kunci** – Strategi Mengajar, Keterampilan Berbicara, Pendidikan di Daerah Pedesaan

**Abstract** – Speaking skill is one of the essential aspects of English learning, especially for students in rural areas who often face obstacles such as limited facilities, low motivation, and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom. This study aims to describe the strategies used by teachers to improve English speaking skills among seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Sekar and SMPN 2 Gondang. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings show that teachers apply various strategies such as role-play, group discussions, and storytelling to encourage students to speak actively. Despite challenges like limited internet access and inadequate learning facilities, teachers continue to innovate to ensure effective learning. It can be concluded that the implemented strategies help improve students' confidence and speaking abilities, although further support is needed to optimize the learning process.

**Keywords** – Teaching Strategies, Speaking Skills, Rural Education

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most crucial skills in learning English as it enables learners to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and emotions clearly. This skill is particularly essential for seventh-grade students in junior high schools, especially those in rural areas, where limited resources and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom often hinder their progress. According to Brown (2015), speaking is a complex skill that requires learners to use appropriate language in diverse social contexts. However, students in rural areas often struggle with inadequate opportunities to practice speaking English, which affects their ability to use the language effectively in everyday communication.

The role of the teacher is critical in overcoming these challenges. Tirtanawati & Prastiwi (2023) emphasize that teachers in rural schools must adapt their strategies to meet students' needs, local conditions, and available resources. By implementing creative and adaptive teaching methods, teachers can overcome the limitations of rural educational environments. Richards (2015) supports the use of communicative strategies, such as role-play and group discussions, as effective tools for encouraging student interaction and language use.

Moreover, motivating students in rural areas requires tasks that are both engaging and contextually relevant. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) argue that students' motivation increases when learning activities are meaningful and enjoyable. For instance, Azizah, et al. (2023) found that organizing English contests helped boost students' confidence and improved their speaking skills by providing a competitive and fun learning environment.

This research, titled "Strategies in Teaching English Speaking Skills in Grade 7 of Junior High Schools in Rural Areas," aims to explore how English teachers at SMPN 1 Sekar and SMPN 2 Gondang apply strategies to enhance students' speaking abilities, despite the challenges of rural education.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the strategies used by teachers in improving English speaking skills among seventh-grade students in rural areas. The research was conducted in two junior high schools: SMPN 1 Sekar and SMPN 2 Gondang, both located in rural areas where challenges such as limited facilities, low motivation, and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom are present.

Data collection methods included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during English language classes to gain insight into the teaching strategies applied in real classroom settings. Interviews were held with the English teachers of the selected schools to gather deeper understanding of the techniques and challenges they face in teaching speaking skills. Documentation was

used to collect any relevant materials, lesson plans, or student work that could support the findings of this study.

The data gathered through these techniques were then analyzed qualitatively. The researcher selected the most relevant data, categorized it, and looked for patterns or themes that emerged during the observations and interviews. Triangulation was employed to verify the data by cross-checking information from the different data sources, namely the observations, interviews, and documents. This process helped ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

By using this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive description of how teachers in rural areas address the challenges of teaching English speaking skills and the effectiveness of the strategies they use.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that English teachers at SMPN 1 Sekar and SMPN 2 Gondang implemented various interactive strategies to enhance the speaking skills of seventh-grade students. The main strategies identified through observation, interviews, and documentation included role-play, group discussions, and storytelling. Each of these strategies played a significant role in encouraging students to use English actively in communicative contexts.

Role-play was frequently used by teachers to simulate real-life situations. This method allowed students to practice speaking in a contextualized and meaningful way, which helped reduce their anxiety and built their confidence. For instance, students were asked to act out scenarios such as shopping, visiting a doctor, or being at a restaurant. These activities align with Harmer (2015), who emphasizes that role-play enables students to engage in authentic communication and makes language learning more memorable. Moreover, Ladousse (2014) notes that role-play is effective for shy students, as it provides a “mask” that allows them to express themselves more freely.

Group discussion was another key strategy. Teachers divided students into small groups and provided them with engaging topics to discuss. In this collaborative setting, students had more opportunities to practice speaking in a low-pressure environment. The interactive nature of group discussions allowed students to build fluency and develop critical thinking as they exchanged ideas. Kayi-Aydar (2021) supports this by stating that group discussions promote peer interaction, which is essential for developing spoken fluency and learner autonomy. Additionally, discussions that are relevant to students’ lives tend to increase their motivation and participation (Richards, 2015).

Storytelling was also applied to strengthen students’ ability to organize their thoughts and speak coherently. Students were tasked with retelling short stories in their own words, which encouraged them to use new vocabulary and structure their sentences effectively. This strategy not only improved their fluency but also helped

them develop narrative skills. According to Ismail et al. (2020), storytelling enhances both receptive and productive language skills and fosters creativity in language use. Furthermore, Wright (2016) argues that storytelling creates an emotional connection that boosts memory retention and language comprehension.

Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, the teachers encountered several challenges. Among the most pressing were limited infrastructure (e.g., absence of LCD projectors and audiovisual aids), unstable internet connection, and low student motivation, especially among students with weaker English proficiency. These issues reflect the general condition of many rural schools in Indonesia, as mentioned by Tirtanawati and Prastiwi (2023), who highlight that teaching English in rural settings requires not only pedagogical skills but also strong adaptability.

To address these challenges, the teachers demonstrated creativity and resilience. They utilized simple but effective teaching aids, such as picture cards, puppets, and open spaces for outdoor learning. These low-tech solutions created engaging environments that supported speaking activities even without modern tools. They also provided positive reinforcement, such as praise and constructive feedback, to build students' confidence. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021), emotional support and a positive classroom climate significantly influence learners' willingness to communicate, especially in foreign language settings.

Furthermore, the data revealed that these strategies led to noticeable improvements in students' speaking performance and confidence. Teachers reported that students who were initially reluctant to speak became more active and willing to participate in class activities. These findings are in line with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and supportive scaffolding in language development.

When compared to previous studies, such as the one by Tirtanawati and Prastiwi (2023), the current research shares similarities in the use of communicative strategies but also contributes a unique insight into how emotional support and context-based innovation are particularly important in rural settings. Teachers did not merely apply standard teaching methods but adapted them according to the needs of their students and the limitations of their environment.

In conclusion, the results highlight the importance of teacher creativity, contextual sensitivity, and emotional support in enhancing speaking skills in rural schools. While infrastructural support remains a crucial need, the proactive attitude of teachers plays a central role in transforming challenges into opportunities for effective language learning.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the strategies implemented by teachers to improve English speaking skills in seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Sekar and SMPN 2 Gondang are effective in enhancing student

engagement and speaking abilities. The teachers have successfully used various strategies such as role-play, group discussions, and storytelling to encourage students to actively participate in speaking activities.

Despite the challenges faced in rural areas, such as limited facilities and low student motivation, the teachers have shown great effort in overcoming these obstacles by using innovative methods and creating a positive, supportive, and interactive learning environment. The use of these strategies has not only improved students' speaking skills but also helped build their confidence in speaking English.

It is clear that although the current strategies are effective, there is still a need for additional support in terms of better facilities and access to technology to further optimize the learning process. Teachers in rural areas need more resources to improve the quality of learning and to provide more comprehensive support for their students' language development. Therefore, the success of teaching speaking skills in rural areas depends on both teacher creativity and external support in overcoming challenges.

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