

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) TO IMPROVE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AT SMPN 9 PALU

Sitti Aisyah binti M.Ikhwan1) *, Konder Manurung2) *, Anita3) *

Tadulako University^{1,3)}*
SMPN 9 Palu²⁾*

*) e-mail: ichaaisyah223000@gmail.com (corresponding author)

Abstrak

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris siswa kelas VIII di SMP Negeri 9 Palu. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh rendahnya kemampuan berbicara siswa, yang disebabkan oleh kurangnya rasa percaya diri dan motivasi yang terbatas. Untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut, pendekatan *Social-Emotional Learning* (SEL) diterapkan sebagai intervensi utama. Penelitian ini mengikuti model siklus penelitian tindakan kelas Kemmis dan McTaggart yang dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes lisan, lembar observasi, dan catatan refleksi guru, kemudian dianalisis dengan metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk mengukur perkembangan siswa serta mendeskripsikan proses pembelajaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dan konsisten dalam keterampilan berbicara siswa di setiap tahap. Persentase siswa yang mencapai kriteria ketuntasan minimum meningkat dari 10% pada pra-siklus menjadi 50% pada Siklus I, dan akhirnya mencapai 83,3% pada Siklus II. Kemajuan kuantitatif ini didukung kuat oleh temuan kualitatif yang menunjukkan adanya pertumbuhan yang nyata dalam kepercayaan diri siswa, kesediaan untuk berpartisipasi, dan kesiapan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Sebagai kesimpulan, penerapan pendekatan SEL terbukti efektif tidak hanya dalam meningkatkan performa berbicara siswa, tetapi juga dalam menumbuhkan motivasi intrinsik dan rasa percaya diri mereka.

Kata Kunci: Keterampilan Berbicara Bahasa Inggris, *Social-Emotional Learning* (SEL), Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK), Kepercayaan Diri Siswa

Abstract

This classroom action research aimed to enhance the English-speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 9 Palu. The study was motivated by students' low speaking proficiency, which stemmed from a lack of self-confidence and limited motivation. To address this issue, the *Social-Emotional Learning* (SEL) approach was implemented as a key intervention.

The research followed the cyclical model of classroom action research by Kemmis and McTaggart, conducted over two cycles. Data were collected through oral tests, observation sheets, and teacher reflection notes, and were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to measure student progress and describe the learning process.

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Results showed significant and consistent progress in students' speaking skills across all stages. The percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criteria increased from 10% in the pre-cycle to 50% in Cycle I, and ultimately to 83.3% in Cycle II. This quantitative progress was strongly supported by qualitative findings, which revealed notable growth in students' confidence, willingness to participate, and readiness to communicate in English.

In conclusion, the implementation of the SEL approach proved effective not only in enhancing students' speaking performance but also in fostering their intrinsic motivation and self-confidence.

Keywords: English Speaking Skills, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Classroom Action Research (CAR), Student Self-Confidence

INTRODUCTION

English is widely recognized as an essential global language, serving as the primary communication tool in various fields such as education, technology, and business. Speaking skills, in particular, are one of the most crucial competencies for students to master, as they enable them to interact, exchange information, and actively participate in a global environment. This skill is vital for 21st-century workforce readiness and academic success, yet it often poses a significant challenge for students in Indonesia. Generally, English language learning in Indonesia is still dominated by traditional approaches that focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than communicative practice (Wulandari & Wibowo, 2021). This often leads to students having difficulty with oral communication, frequently caused by a lack of self-confidence, anxiety when speaking in public (*language anxiety*), and a lack of intrinsic motivation to use English outside of the classroom.

The psychological barriers to language acquisition in the Indonesian context are particularly pronounced. Students often exhibit a high "affective filter," which manifests in the form of anxiety and lack of self-confidence that hinder language learning (Asfar, 2023). This communicative apprehension, often driven by fear of negative evaluation, prevents them from taking risks, such as attempting to speak in front of peers, which is essential for developing fluency (Anggraini & Rahmah, 2023). As a result, students fall into a vicious cycle: they are afraid to speak, which limits their practice, leading to stagnant skills and a deepening sense of inadequacy. This issue is not merely a linguistic one but a significant emotional and psychological challenge that conventional teaching methods often fail to address.

In light of these challenges, there is a clear and urgent need for a learning approach that focuses not only on linguistic skills but also on students' psychological and social-emotional well-being. Education has long recognized that academic success is not determined by intellectual intelligence alone. The ability to manage emotions and interact effectively is a crucial foundation for the learning process. The implementation of the *Social-Emotional Learning* (SEL) approach is therefore considered a relevant and promising solution. This approach, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), aims to help students recognize and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and develop empathy. By focusing on these core competencies, SEL can directly address the very barriers that prevent students from succeeding in language acquisition.

The academic community has increasingly provided strong empirical evidence supporting the positive impact of SEL on academic outcomes. For instance, a meta-analysis by Panahipour

(2020) found a significant correlation between SEL interventions and improved student achievement, particularly in language-related subjects. Furthermore, researchers have specifically highlighted SEL's role in mitigating language anxiety. According to a study by Alqahtani (2021), "the integration of SEL competencies into the language classroom can significantly reduce foreign language anxiety and enhance students' willingness to communicate." This confirms that creating a supportive, emotionally safe environment is a powerful catalyst for breaking down psychological barriers and unlocking students' full potential.

Based on this background and the urgency of the issue, this research was conducted with the aim of examining the effectiveness of implementing the *Social-Emotional Learning* approach in enhancing students' English-speaking skills. This classroom action research seeks to answer the question of how SEL-based learning strategies can systematically improve and develop the speaking skills of students in class VIII-F at SMP Negeri 9 Palu.

METHOD

This study adopted a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, a form of research conducted within a social situation, such as a classroom, with the goal of improving the quality of actions within it (Elliott, 1991). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 9 Palu during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The subjects of this study were 30 students from class VIII-F, consisting of 17 females and 13 males.

The research procedure followed the cyclical model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which includes four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This study was carried out in a pre-cycle, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2, with each cycle consisting of a single meeting. All stages were systematically designed to enhance students' English-speaking skills through the implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) approach.

Data collection was carried out through a combination of several techniques. Observation sheets were used to directly monitor students' and the teacher's activities during the learning process, focusing on engagement, participation, and interaction in the classroom. In addition, a speaking skills test was designed to measure students' English competency by evaluating essential aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and comprehension. Teacher reflection notes were also used to record the qualitative evaluation of the learning process from the educator's perspective. To complete the data, documentation in the form of activity photos, field notes, and grade recapitulations was also collected.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative analysis was applied to interpret the data from observation sheets and documentation, aiming to describe changes in students' attitudes, enthusiasm, and engagement. Meanwhile, quantitative analysis was used to process the test results to identify the percentage increase in students' abilities from the pre-cycle to the final cycle. The results of this analysis served as the basis for reflection and revise in each cycle, ensuring continuous progress in the learning process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to improve the English-speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 9 Palu. This research used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design with a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) approach. The research was implemented in two cycles, following

the four main stages of the Kemmis and McTaggart model: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

The first stage was planning. Here, the researcher designed a learning strategy that integrated the SEL approach for Cycle I. The planning included preparing a lesson plan, teaching materials, and assessment instruments such as a speaking skills test and an observation sheet. The strategy was designed to focus on role-playing activities and providing positive reinforcement to boost students' self-confidence.

The second stage was acting. The plan was implemented during the teaching and learning process in class VIII-F. The teacher explained the material, divided students into groups, and asked each group to perform a dialogue role-play. Throughout the implementation, the teacher continuously provided support and positive words to encourage students to be more confident in speaking.

The third stage was observing. During the implementation, the researcher observed and recorded student activities using a pre-prepared observation sheet. The observation focused on the level of student participation, interaction, and emotional expression. The data collected showed that some students were still passive and lacked confidence, despite a slight progress from the initial condition.

The final stage was reflecting. After Cycle I was completed, the researcher evaluated the results of the observations and tests. Although there was an increase in scores, the mastery target was not fully achieved. This indicated a need for strategic improvements, such as providing more motivation, implementing stricter group work rules, and encouraging more intensive use of English in the classroom. The results of this reflection became the basis for formulating the revise plan for Cycle II.

Analysis of Student Learning Outcomes

This study aimed to improve students' English-speaking skills as measured by an oral test. The test results from the three stages of the research (pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II) showed a significant progress, as presented in the table below:

No	Aspect	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II
1	Number of students who passed	3 students	15 students	25 students
2	Number of students who did not pass	27 students	15 students	5 students
3	Highest score	90	95	95
4	Lowest score	50	50	55
5	Average score	61.25	70.41	80
6	Percentage of Mastery (%)	10%	50%	83.3%
7	Percentage of Not Mastered (%)	90%	50%	16.7%

Pre-Cycle Results: The Initial Condition

The pre-cycle assessment revealed that students' speaking competence was considerably below the expected standard. Only 3 students (10%) successfully met the minimum mastery

criterion of ≥ 75 , while the majority—27 students (90%)—remained below the threshold. The class average score was 61.25, with the highest score at 90 and the lowest at 50.

Classroom observations confirmed these findings. Most students were hesitant to speak in English, often avoiding eye contact and demonstrating low levels of confidence. Speaking activities were dominated by silence and hesitation, largely due to students' fear of making mistakes. These conditions indicated that the main barriers to learning were not limited to linguistic challenges but also involved affective factors such as anxiety and lack of motivation.

Cycle I Results: Initial Progress through SEL

The introduction of SEL strategies in Cycle I produced encouraging results. The number of students achieving mastery increased substantially from 3 to 15 (50%), while the class average rose from 61.25 to 70.41. The lowest score remained at 50, whereas the highest improved slightly to 95. These outcomes suggested that SEL strategies began to alleviate students' anxiety and enhance their willingness to participate in speaking activities.

However, the mastery target had not yet been fully achieved, as 15 students (50%) remained below the expected level. Observations indicated uneven progress: some students demonstrated greater confidence and active engagement, while others continued to display hesitation and reluctance to participate. These findings pointed to the need for more refined and personalized interventions in the subsequent cycle.

Cycle II Results: Significant Progress and Breakthrough

Refinements implemented in Cycle II led to marked in both performance and participation. A total of 25 students (83.3%) successfully achieved the minimum mastery criterion, leaving only 5 students (16.7%) below the standard. The class average score increased significantly to 80, with the lowest score improving to 55, while the highest remained stable at 95.

In addition to the quantitative progress, significant qualitative changes were also observed in Cycle II. Students who were previously passive and reluctant to speak began to demonstrate active participation in classroom activities. They no longer avoided eye contact but instead showed readiness to interact with both the teacher and their peers. Several students who had shown low self-confidence in the pre-cycle and Cycle I started to display greater courage to communicate and a higher level of assurance when speaking in English.

The progress in achievement was evident not only in the increase of test scores and mastery percentage (from 10% in the pre-cycle to 83.3% in Cycle II), but also in the quality of their oral performance. Students were able to speak with better fluency and sustain conversations for longer periods compared to previous stages. This indicates that the implementation of the SEL approach effectively reduced students' affective barriers, enabling them to focus more on producing spoken English.

Alongside this academic progress, students' intrinsic motivation also showed remarkable growth. They exhibited greater enthusiasm in speaking activities, with many confidently presenting their work in front of the class. Some students also began to initiate English conversations with their group members, something that had not been observed in earlier cycles. The anxiety and hesitation that characterized the pre-cycle shifted into a spirit of contribution and collaboration. Positive peer support, teacher reinforcement, and a safe classroom atmosphere encouraged students to take risks and learn from mistakes.

These findings clearly demonstrate that the implementation of the SEL approach not only improved students' English-speaking skills significantly but also fostered their motivation, self-

confidence, and willingness to communicate. By balancing cognitive skill development with emotional support, this approach directly answers the research question, proving that SEL is an effective strategy to systematically enhance both achievement and motivation in developing English-speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) approach is effective in enhancing the English-speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 9 Palu. The progress is clearly demonstrated by the consistent quantitative results, showing an increase in the percentage of students who achieved mastery from 10% in the pre-cycle, to 50% in Cycle I, and finally to 83.3% in Cycle II. Beyond numerical achievement, students also showed significant qualitative growth, including higher levels of confidence, stronger motivation, greater willingness to participate, and more positive interaction during classroom activities.

These results directly answer the research question by confirming that SEL not only improves students' academic achievement in speaking but also fosters their emotional readiness, motivation, and self-confidence. By integrating both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, SEL provides a systematic and holistic strategy for developing English-speaking skills. Therefore, this classroom action research successfully demonstrates that SEL is a powerful and practical approach to help students overcome psychological barriers and achieve sustainable progress in language learning.

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