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Improving Speaking Ability through Memorization Method and Language Learning: An Action Research

Anis Setiyanti[1]

[1] Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia; anissetiyanti@umj.ac. id

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ABSTRACT

Many students in higher education face persistent challenges in English speaking proficiency, often due to limited vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and fluency. This study aimed to improve students' English speaking skills through the application of the memorization method supported by mobile-assisted language learning. This action research employed the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which includes four cyclical stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research involved fourth-semester students in the Islamic Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University Jakarta. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating both qualitative data (from observations and interviews) and quantitative data (from pre-cycle and three subsequent cycle tests). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic interpretation. The results showed progressive improvement in students' speaking performance across all cycles. In the pre-cycle phase, students' average scores fell into the unsatisfactory category. These increased to moderately satisfactory in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, and reached the satisfactory category in Cycle 3, with an average score of 81%. Students demonstrated notable gains in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar usage, and fluency. Additionally, the integration of mobile devices for memorization practice enhanced engagement and accessibility in learning. The findings suggest that the memorization method, when combined with mobile learning tools, can significantly enhance students' English speaking ability. This approach offers a practical pedagogical strategy to address common barriers in speaking skills among EFL learners.

Corresponding Author:
Anis Setiyanti
Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta 1;anissetiyanti@umj.ac. id

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for language learners to acquire, yet it is also the most essential for effective communication. Among the key components in language acquisition, the ability to use vocabulary in context and pronounce words fluently plays a critical role in achieving oral proficiency (Long & Doughty, 2009). For students learning English as a foreign

language (EFL), speaking is not merely about word recognition or sentence structure—it involves the integration of multiple language components, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Goh, 2016). Without mastery of these linguistic aspects, students often struggle to express themselves clearly and confidently in English.

Effective speaking in a second language requires both declarative and procedural knowledge. Language learners must not only understand the rules of grammar and phonology but also apply them spontaneously during real-time interaction (Harmer, 2003). This is particularly true for university students, who are expected to develop balanced competence across the four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—in order to succeed academically and professionally (Brown & Yule, 1983). Among these, speaking remains a top priority because it is the most direct form of communication used in everyday life.

However, numerous studies have highlighted persistent challenges in speaking proficiency among EFL learners. Hamouda (2012) found that many students have difficulty speaking English due to limited language exposure, low confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Similarly, Dalem (2017) observed that anxiety, shyness, and low motivation significantly hinder students' willingness to engage in speaking activities. The lack of grammar and vocabulary mastery further compounds these difficulties, making it harder for learners to construct meaningful utterances (Megawati, 2016).

Preliminary observations conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta reveal similar issues. Based on pre-cycle diagnostic assessments in the Islamic Education Study Program, only 5 out of 24 students scored above the minimum passing grade of 70. Most students exhibited significant weaknesses in grammar usage, pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. Moreover, interviews with lecturers revealed that students rarely use English in classroom discussions, relying instead on reading from written texts rather than speaking spontaneously. This suggests that speaking activities are often not effectively integrated into classroom instruction, which results in limited opportunities for students to practice and develop oral proficiency.

A deeper analysis of student performance showed that during presentations, learners tended to read from prepared texts rather than engage in meaningful conversation. This practice reflects a lack of confidence and insufficient grammatical and lexical competence. Nunan (2004) emphasizes the importance of developing interactional competence in speaking, which includes the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences, use appropriate vocabulary, and respond to interlocutors in real time. To address this, learners need regular feedback on their grammatical performance and opportunities to self-correct through guided reflection and peer collaboration.

In response to these challenges, educators have sought alternative teaching methods to enhance speaking skills, one of which is the recitation or memorization method. The memorization method, often used within the framework of assignment-based or task-based learning (TBL), allows students to internalize language patterns through repeated practice (Richards, 2006). In this context, tasks are designed to replicate real-world communication and can vary in complexity depending on the learners' proficiency level (Ellis et al., 2019). The method encourages students to engage with authentic content, practice language structures, and improve fluency through repetition and active recall.

However, applying the memorization method effectively requires instructors to be aware of the specific linguistic needs of their students. Long (2015) suggests that meaningful negotiation of meaning, structured task design, and authentic use of the target language are critical components of successful TBL. Additionally, Namaziandost et al. (2019) advocate for culturally relevant and interest-driven tasks to enhance student engagement. Lecturers must therefore design speaking tasks that are not only pedagogically sound but also aligned with learners' interests and backgrounds (Burguillo, 2010).

Parallel to the development of pedagogical methods, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has gained increasing attention in recent years. The proliferation of mobile technologies—such as smartphones, tablets, and language learning applications—has created new opportunities for students to practice English outside the classroom (Hsu, 2013). Mobile platforms offer flexibility, enabling

learners to access learning materials anytime and anywhere, thereby overcoming limitations of traditional classroom settings.

The integration of mobile applications with memorization-based instruction presents a promising approach to improving speaking proficiency. When used effectively, these tools can provide learners with repeated exposure to vocabulary, pronunciation models, and interactive speaking tasks. Furthermore, mobile applications facilitate autonomous learning, allowing students to review content at their own pace and seek clarification through peer interactions in digital learning communities.

The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the memorization method, enhanced with mobile learning tools, in improving the English speaking skills of fourth-semester students in the Islamic Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta. Specifically, the study explores how structured repetition and mobile-based practice influence learners' development in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and overall comprehension.

To assess speaking proficiency, this research adopts Brown's (2004) analytic scoring rubric, which evaluates performance across six dimensions: pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and coherence. By applying an action research framework—using the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2014)—the study seeks to implement and evaluate a targeted intervention over three cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Burns (2009) underscores the importance of aligning pedagogical interventions with students' real learning needs and iteratively refining teaching strategies through classroom-based inquiry. As such, this study contributes to the growing body of research on reflective teaching practices and learner-centered methodologies in EFL contexts.

In addition, the use of the memorization method through mobile-assisted learning offers pedagogical advantages. Learners can independently practice speaking skills, compare spoken input with their own performance, and gain confidence through accessible and repeated practice. This is particularly beneficial for students in urban areas with limited classroom time due to transportation or scheduling constraints. Furthermore, integrating mobile learning supports students in becoming more autonomous and self-directed, which is essential for language development in the 21st century (Sukavatee & Khlaisang, 2023).

In summary, speaking proficiency remains a crucial yet underdeveloped skill among many university students in EFL contexts. Addressing this gap requires innovative, research-informed approaches that combine effective pedagogical methods with supportive technologies. The current study explores how the memorization method, supported by mobile learning, can be implemented in an action research framework to improve students' English speaking ability and increase learner engagement and motivation.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a classroom action research design, which integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Action research is characterized by the direct involvement of educators in identifying, planning, implementing, and evaluating changes in their own teaching practices (Burns, 2009). It enables practitioners to act as researchers, facilitating iterative improvements in instructional strategies. In this context, the researcher assumed the dual role of instructor and investigator, focusing on enhancing English speaking skills through the memorization method.

The qualitative aspect of this study involved collecting and analyzing data through observations and interviews to gain deeper insights into the learning process and student engagement. The quantitative component included test scores from multiple cycles, which were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Both types of data were used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention and monitor changes over time.

The research followed the Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) model of action research, which consists of a spiral of recurring stages: (a) planning, (b) action, (c) observation, and (d) reflection. This cycle was repeated over three iterations to allow for continuous refinement of instructional practices and to measure the impact of the memorization method on speaking proficiency.

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study were fourth-semester students enrolled in the Islamic Education Study Program, Elite Class, at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta. The selection was based on purposive sampling, targeting students who were enrolled in the English speaking course. A total of 24 students participated in the study.

The focus of this research was limited to students' speaking skills, excluding other language domains such as reading, writing, and listening. The research was integrated into the regular course schedule, which was conducted once a week over the duration of one semester. Each action cycle is aligned with the course's weekly meetings.

2.3 Instruments

Three main instruments were used for data collection:

1. Observation Sheets – to record classroom activities, student engagement, and speaking performance during each cycle.
2. Interview Guidelines – semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers to gather qualitative insights into learning experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the memorization method.
3. Speaking Tests – administered before the intervention (pre-cycle) and after each action cycle (Cycle I, II, and III) to evaluate student progress.

To ensure the validity of the instruments, content validity was employed. This was done by aligning the test items with recognized standards of English speaking assessment, particularly referencing the IELTS speaking rubric and Duolingo English Test components (Mehtälä, 2015). These instruments assess speaking performance across four main areas: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. The test materials used were adapted to match the curriculum and learning objectives of the course.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out in accordance with the Kemmis and McTaggart action research framework (Kemmis, 2014), involving the following steps in each cycle:

1. Planning: Identification of problems in students' speaking abilities and the formulation of learning strategies using the memorization method.
2. Action: Implementation of the memorization-based learning activities, integrated with mobile-assisted practice.
3. Observation: Systematic monitoring of classroom dynamics, student participation, and performance using structured observation formats.
4. Reflection: Evaluation of the outcomes of the intervention in terms of quality, effectiveness, and student responses, followed by adjustments for the next cycle.

Each cycle produced data in the form of observation notes, interview transcripts, and test scores. These data were collected collaboratively with the support of course lecturers, ensuring consistency and triangulation.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process combined qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact:

1. Quantitative Data Analysis: Student speaking scores from the pre-test and post-tests (Cycles I, II, III) were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage increases and mean score comparisons. The aim was to identify patterns of improvement in student performance over time.
2. Qualitative Data Analysis: An interactive model of analysis was employed, involving the steps of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Observational data and interview responses were categorized thematically to capture recurring patterns related to student attitudes, learning challenges, and perceptions of the memorization method.

The combination of these analytical techniques allowed the researcher to evaluate not only the measurable outcomes of the intervention but also the underlying processes that contributed to student learning. These insights were critical in shaping the next phase of each action cycle and refining the teaching strategies used.

2.6 Action Intervention Design

The intervention involved the integration of the memorization method through mobile devices, designed to enhance vocabulary retention, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and speaking fluency. The intervention was implemented over three action cycles, each consisting of the following phases:

1. Cycle I: Introduction to the memorization method with guided repetition exercises and basic mobile app usage.
2. Cycle II: Increased use of interactive speaking tasks and peer collaboration using mobile platforms.
3. Cycle III: Independent use of memorization apps (e.g., Duolingo, Cake) with feedback sessions to improve pronunciation and fluency.

Each cycle spanned approximately three weeks and was followed by a reflective evaluation to measure progress and inform the next phase.

By applying this systematic and reflective action research approach, the study aimed to explore the extent to which the memorization method—supported by mobile-assisted learning—could enhance the speaking proficiency of EFL students in a university context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the results and discussion of the study, focusing on the development of students' English speaking skills through the implementation of the memorization method. The analysis covers the entire research process, beginning with the pre-observation phase and continuing through the implementation of three action cycles. Each cycle is described in detail, including the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection, as outlined in the action research framework.

The findings are structured according to the outcomes of each cycle, highlighting the progression of students' speaking abilities over time. The results from each cycle served as the basis for planning the next stage, ensuring a continuous process of refinement and improvement. This iterative design reflects the core principles of action research, where each phase builds upon the previous one to achieve targeted learning outcomes.

The quantitative results are presented through a descriptive analysis of students' speaking performance, starting from the pre-test stage. The bar chart below illustrates the distribution of students' scores before the intervention was applied, providing a baseline for comparison with the subsequent test results in Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3.

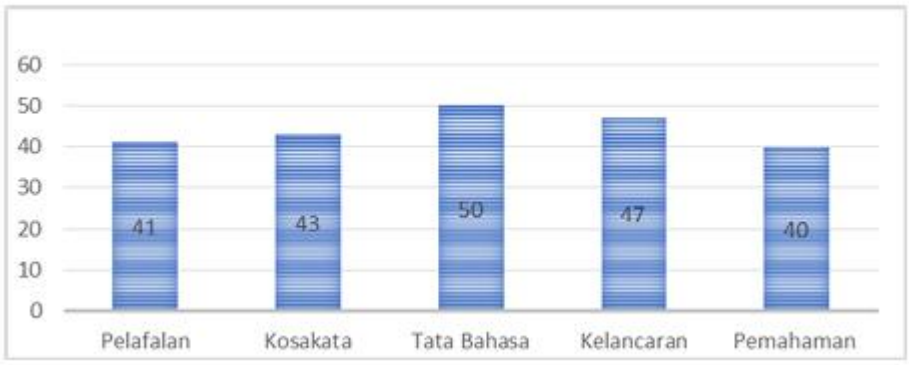

Figure 1. Pre-test of Students' English Speaking Skills

The pre-test results indicated several major challenges in students' English speaking proficiency. First, students exhibited a low level of interest in speaking activities. This lack of motivation was reflected in their reluctance to engage actively during classroom discussions. Second, their fundamental language components—pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar—were significantly underdeveloped, which made it difficult for them to understand or deliver spoken English effectively. Third, students demonstrated varied cognitive capacities, with some struggling more than others in processing and retaining material delivered in English. Finally, the absence of engaging learning media was noted as a hindrance; students needed more accessible and interactive tools to help them comprehend the material.

3.1 Cycle I: Initial Improvement with Identified Limitations

The first intervention cycle applied the memorization method and introduced technology-based learning. The average student score increased from the pre-test (44.2%) to 55.6%. While this indicates progress, the result was still categorized as unsatisfactory. Students began to show improvements in their interest and engagement, but several speaking components remained weak. Observations revealed that pronunciation was often inaccurate, vocabulary usage was limited and repetitive, and grammatical errors were frequent. Fluency was also lacking, with many students hesitating or relying on memorized chunks without genuine communication. Moreover, students were unfamiliar with how to use mobile devices as language learning tools, indicating a need for digital literacy support.

These findings align with Rauf (in Susanti, 2016), who noted that memorization involves a process of repetition—crucial in building vocabulary and improving pronunciation in language learning. However, as Richards and Schmidt (2013) suggest, effective memorization also requires conscious cognitive engagement, such as organizing information and making connections, which had not yet been fully achieved by most students in this cycle.

3.2 Cycle II: Substantial Gains and Increased Engagement

During Cycle II, instructional methods were refined, and students became more accustomed to both the memorization tasks and the use of mobile learning applications. The average speaking test score rose to 68.8%, a 13.2% increase from Cycle I. This placed the class performance in the moderately satisfactory category. Notably, students' comprehension of spoken English improved, and their fluency and vocabulary range expanded. Pronunciation was clearer, and grammatical structures were more accurate, although errors still occurred.

This improvement suggests that task repetition, contextualized vocabulary, and mobile-based learning can contribute positively to speaking development. This supports the findings of Mufidah (2017), who emphasized that meaningful repetition through memorization helps internalize

language patterns, and Anggi Aulia Rizki (2022), who advocated for integrating digital media into language education to enhance accessibility and motivation.

However, despite these gains, the target benchmark of 75% had not yet been achieved, warranting a third intervention cycle. As also highlighted by Nunan (2004), students need structured feedback and opportunities for self-correction to consolidate their learning, which was further emphasized in this cycle.

3.3 Cycle III: Achieving the Target

In Cycle III, the memorization method was further strengthened by increased personalization of tasks and continuous feedback from lecturers. Students worked more independently using mobile applications such as Duolingo and Cake, which allowed for repeated practice of vocabulary, grammar, and speaking tasks. As a result, the class average reached 81%, surpassing the performance target and categorizing the results as satisfactory.

The most notable improvement in Cycle III was in fluency and comprehension. Students demonstrated more confidence, spontaneity, and accuracy in speaking. They showed better control over language structures and were able to engage in simple conversations without relying on written texts. These findings are consistent with Khusnul Khotimah (2025), who highlighted that vocabulary memorization significantly enhances students' ability to communicate effectively in real-life contexts.

Additionally, the improvement in speaking scores demonstrates the successful implementation of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). As Hsu (2013) explains, mobile learning reduces the limitations of time and place, enabling learners to practice beyond the classroom and become more autonomous.

3.4 Analysis Across Cycles and Supporting Studies

Across all three cycles, the memorization method combined with mobile technology led to progressive improvements in all speaking components. The learning process moved from basic memorization to meaningful communication. This progression confirms that memorization, when integrated with contextual learning and reflective practices, can be a powerful tool in language development (Richards, 2006; Mehtälä, 2015).

Supporting studies indicate that instructional strategies such as role-play and the recitation method can enhance not only speaking skills but also students' confidence and motivation (Mustika & Lestari, 2020; Sukma et al., 2023). Other research has shown that memorization is effective in promoting active student involvement and aligning learning with specific objectives (Halawa & Chrismastianto, 2021; Rochmania et al., 2022).

Zuhro (2016) found that learning outcomes in English are influenced by attitude (34%), motivation (31%), and teaching methods (5%), with the remaining variance attributed to external factors. This aligns with the findings of this study, where students' increased motivation and improved learning methods (through memorization and technology) led to significant performance gains.

3.5 Implications and Broader Perspectives

These results carry several pedagogical implications. First, memorization should not be dismissed as a rote technique but rather embraced as a foundational strategy when combined with comprehension and contextual use. Second, mobile-assisted tools provide flexible and engaging platforms that support students in practicing language skills at their own pace. This reinforces the value of digital integration in language instruction (Sukavatee & Khlaisang, 2023; Pingmuang & Koraneekij, 2022).

Moreover, personal initiative and intrinsic motivation were found to be essential in sustaining student engagement. Sari (2018) emphasized that students who are motivated and persistent in

completing speaking tasks are more likely to achieve proficiency. Educators should therefore foster an environment that encourages self-directed learning, provides timely feedback, and reduces anxiety associated with speaking tasks (Irmawati, 2016; Ali et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the application of the memorization method—especially when supported by mobile learning—proved effective in improving students' English speaking ability across three action research cycles. Students moved from a position of limited confidence and competence to one of measurable improvement in fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension. The study reaffirms the value of structured repetition, digital engagement, and action research in designing responsive and effective EFL instruction.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the application of the memorization method, supported by mobile-assisted learning tools, significantly improved students' English speaking skills across three action research cycles. Students' average speaking scores increased consistently, from 44.2% in the pre-test, to 55.6% in Cycle I, 68.8% in Cycle II, and ultimately 81% in Cycle III, indicating steady progress in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These improvements demonstrate that structured memorization, when combined with appropriate technology, can be an effective strategy to enhance speaking proficiency in EFL learners. However, the study has several limitations, including a small sample size (24 students), limited instructional time per cycle (110 minutes), and potential subjectivity in scoring, particularly due to the relatively high baseline proficiency of the students involved. Additionally, the study focused on three applications simultaneously, which may have introduced variability in learners' experiences. Future research is encouraged to expand the sample size, diversify participant proficiency levels, and explore other instructional methods such as the demonstration method to promote active student engagement. It is also recommended that further studies examine the long-term retention of speaking improvements and compare the effectiveness of memorization with other communicative or interactive strategies in varied educational settings.

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