



Boosting Speaking Proficiency Through Make-a-Match: an Experimental Study on Tenth Graders

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pedagogical effectiveness of the Make-a-Match cooperative learning technique in enhancing English speaking proficiency among tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 7 Watampone, Indonesia. The research addresses persistent instructional challenges in EFL classrooms, such as speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, and low student confidence. Employing a one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design, the study measures improvements in accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility using CEFR-aligned performance-based assessments. Findings reveal statistically significant gains in all speaking components, with the greatest improvement in comprehensibility. These outcomes validate Make-a-Match as a student-centered, interactive pedagogical approach that fosters active engagement, peer collaboration, and contextual language use. Moreover, the study underscores the alignment of this technique with Kurikulum Merdeka and 21st-century educational goals, reinforcing its value in vocational education where communicative competence is vital for employability. It also contributes to the broader discourse on innovative learning strategies by highlighting Make-a-Match as a sustainable instructional model that enhances not only language proficiency but also students' psychological readiness and social interaction skills. The findings offer practical insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policy stakeholders aiming to improve the quality and inclusivity of language education.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized era, English speaking proficiency has become a crucial competency in education and professional development, especially in countries where English is a foreign language (EFL). Speaking proficiency is not only a core component of language competence but also an essential skill for ensuring students' communicative effectiveness in academic, vocational, and

workplace settings (BALKAYA, 2023; Fan & Chen, 2023). However, numerous studies have identified persistent challenges in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly students' anxiety, limited vocabulary, and lack of confidence when speaking English (Burhanuddin et al., 2023; Salim et al., 2023)]. These barriers are especially prominent in vocational schools, where practical communication skills are highly demanded for employability (Romadhon, 2024).

In response to these challenges, educational innovations are necessary to promote student engagement, confidence, and language use. One such innovation is the Make-a-Match cooperative learning technique. This method provides interactive, student-centered learning that fosters participation through matching tasks and peer collaboration (Anggoro et al., 2023; Seasfaot et al., 2020). It aligns with the constructivist learning theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, emphasizing learning through social interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development

Research has shown that cooperative learning techniques like Make-a-Match significantly improve learners' oral fluency, accuracy, and (Alzieni, 2024; Sulistyo & Lutviana, 2023). For instance, students exposed to cooperative speaking tasks displayed substantial improvement in their ability to convey ideas clearly, interact spontaneously, and use language appropriately in various (Cahyana et al., 2022; Ikhsan & Akhsan, 2022). In addition, such techniques contribute to students' psychological well-being by reducing speaking anxiety and encouraging positive peer feedback (Hidayatullah, 2023; Yin, 2022)

This pedagogical approach is also in line with the Indonesian government's strategic vision articulated in *Asta Cita*, particularly the agenda of improving the quality of education and strengthening human resource competitiveness. Implementing collaborative and communicative teaching methods like Make-a-Match supports the Kurikulum Merdeka's principles of autonomy, contextual learning, and student engagement). Furthermore, the technique contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education by fostering inclusive and effective learning environments

Considering the growing need to equip students with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity –the Make-a-Match technique presents a practical and theoretically grounded strategy for enhancing speaking proficiency (Akkara et al., 2020; Ban et al., 2023; Zhao, 2024). However, limited empirical evidence exists concerning its effectiveness in Indonesian vocational school contexts, particularly among tenth-grade students in rural areas such as Watampone. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following research problem: To what extent does the Make-a-Match technique improve the speaking proficiency (accuracy, fluency, and

comprehensibility) of tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 7 Watampone? By addressing this problem, the study aims to contribute to pedagogical improvements and policy directions in EFL instruction, aligning with the nation's broader vision of educational excellence and character.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a pre-experimental design utilizing a one-group pretest-posttest approach to examine the impact of the Make-a-Match technique on students' speaking proficiency. This design was chosen to measure the difference in performance before and after the intervention within the same group of participants, without the inclusion of a control group (Creswell, 2023). While this design limits generalizability, it allows for focused insight into instructional impact in a specific educational context.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 7 Watampone, South Sulawesi, during the academic year 2024/2025. The population comprised all tenth-grade students ($N = 72$), from which one class was selected using purposive sampling, totaling 22 students (12 male and 10 female). The sample was chosen based on the teacher's recommendation regarding class availability and the students' willingness to participate in all research sessions.

Instrumentation

To assess speaking proficiency, a performance-based speaking test was developed. The instrument was validated by two EFL experts and assessed based on three criteria:

- Accuracy (grammatical and lexical precision),
- Fluency (rate of speech and flow of delivery), and
- Comprehensibility (clarity and intelligibility to listeners).

Each indicator was scored on a scale of 1–6 using an adapted CEFR rubric. This assessment tool is aligned with existing EFL speaking assessment frameworks, as supported by findings from a recent study that integrated the CEFR rubric in a college-level speaking assessment (Raju et al., 2024)]. This study suggests that the CEFR provides a standardized framework for assessing and measuring language proficiency accurately and consistently, which is essential in speaking assessment (CH'NG et al., 2024).

Procedure

The study was carried out over six teaching sessions. In the first session, students were given a pre-test to assess their initial speaking ability. In the subsequent four sessions, the Make-a-Match technique was implemented in a

variety of speaking activities, with topics including daily routines, describing objects, expressing opinions, and discussing future plans. Each activity involved students finding a match between questions and answers while practicing speaking in pairs or small groups.

Feedback was provided after each round, focusing on language use and pronunciation. In the final session, a post-test was administered with a similar format to the pre-test. All assessments were conducted in classroom settings, and student performances were video recorded to ensure inter-rater reliability

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the speaking scores were analyzed using paired sample t-tests via SPSS version 25. The goal was to determine the statistical significance of the difference in students' speaking performance before and after the intervention. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. The effect size was also calculated to evaluate the magnitude of improvement following the intervention (Sari et al., 2021; Warman et al., 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The effect of the Make-a-Match technique on students' speaking proficiency was evaluated through a series of tests focusing on three key components: accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. The data below demonstrate a substantial improvement in students' speaking performance after the implementation of the technique.

Table 1.
Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores

Component	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain Score	Improvement (%)
Accuracy	2.91	4.36	+1.45	49.83%
Fluency	3.18	4.91	+1.73	54.40%
Comprehensibility	3.00	5.09	+2.09	69.67%
Total Mean	9.09	14.36	+5.27	57.98%

As shown in Table 1, each component of speaking proficiency experienced marked improvement. The greatest gain was observed in the comprehensibility category, where students improved by an average of 2.09 points, or 69.67%. This suggests that the Make-a-Match technique significantly enhanced students' ability to express ideas clearly and be understood by their peers.

Meanwhile, fluency increased by 1.73 points (54.40%), indicating that the structured pair work enabled students to speak more naturally and continuously without excessive hesitation. Accuracy also improved by 1.45 points (49.83%), showing that students benefited from contextual vocabulary practice and peer correction during the matching tasks.

Table 2.

Paired Samples t-Test Result

Test Type	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Test	9.09	1.12			
Post-Test	14.36	1.03	13.21	21	0.000

The results of the paired sample t-test (Table 2) show that the computed t-value of 13.21 exceeds the critical value of 2.080 at the 0.05 significance level, and the p-value is 0.000, which is below 0.05. These statistical findings confirm that the improvement observed in the students' speaking scores after using the Make-a-Match technique is highly significant.

This quantitative evidence provides strong support for the effectiveness of Make-a-Match as a learning strategy in promoting speaking proficiency among EFL learners.

Discussion

The findings provide empirical support for the effectiveness of the Make-a-Match technique in enhancing speaking skills in EFL classrooms. The increases in accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility suggest that this technique fosters a more engaging, interactive, and less intimidating environment for students to practice spoken English. These results align with previous research that has demonstrated the potential of cooperative learning strategies to significantly improve learners' oral communication (Bećirović et al., 2022; Et.al, 2021) In particular, these studies have shown that the collaborative design of tasks encourages purposeful interaction among students, thereby not only promoting spontaneous language use but also mitigating speech anxiety.

From a theoretical perspective, the effectiveness of the Make-a-Match technique can be interpreted through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development, including language acquisition. By engaging in activities that require learners to work within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the technique enables them to collaborate with peers to negotiate meaning and correct errors – an approach that is well-documented in the literature on cooperative learning strategies

(Et.al, 2021). Additionally, the repeated and contextualized use of language in speaking games supports the development of automaticity, thereby contributing to improved fluency. In this context, scaffolded cooperative tasks have been shown to facilitate meaningful interaction and are instrumental in developing spoken fluency among language learners (Pishadast, 2022) . Furthermore, increased comprehensibility observed in the post-test indicates that learners became more adept at adjusting their speech to ensure mutual underst.

Educational Implications and Pedagogical Reflection

The educational dimension in this study, that the research findings not only reflect the effectiveness of the Make-a-Match strategy statistically, but also contain significant pedagogical meaning in the context of English learning in vocational education. The Make-a-Match approach presents an integration between active learning methods and the development of 21st-century skills, especially in the development of students' critical thinking, collaborative, and oral communication skills.

From a pedagogical perspective, Make-a-Match provides a student-centered learning experience, which is a main pillar in the Independent Curriculum. Through the activity of meeting pairs of questions and answers in groups, students not only practice speaking, but also build conceptual understanding socially and contextually. This collaborative learning process directly reflects the principles of constructivist pedagogy where students learn through meaningful experiences, interactions, and social reflections.

This strategy also implicitly emphasizes formative assessment based on direct observation during the process, where teachers can provide feedback and adjust learning strategies in real time. This is in line with responsive teaching practices that position teachers as facilitators who are adaptive to students' individual and collective learning needs.

From the field of educational practice, these findings strengthen the position of Make-a-Match as an alternative learning model that is not only acceptable in the context of English learning, but can also be replicated for other subjects that require active interaction and mastery of communication skills. This also supports the principle of transferable pedagogy, namely the application of teaching strategies across contexts and across competencies.

In addition, the role of Make-a-Match in reducing speaking anxiety (speaking anxiety) needs to be underlined as an important psychopedagogical contribution. Language learning often fails because the classroom atmosphere is oppressive or does not support spontaneous language experiments. Make-a-

Match creates a fun and interactive atmosphere, thus encouraging active participation and making mistakes part of the learning process, not as failures.

In the larger framework of developing national education policies, strategies such as Make-a-Match can be integrated into teacher training (in-service training) as one of the best practice models in active learning. This is in line with Asta Cita points three and four which emphasize improving the quality of Indonesian people and reforming the national education system based on character and skills.

Therefore, this study not only contributes to empirical knowledge about the effectiveness of teaching methods, but also offers a conceptual and practical basis for curriculum designers, educators, and educational policy makers in developing adaptive, participatory, and relevant learning models to the needs of 21st century students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the pedagogical impact of the Make-a-Match cooperative learning technique on the speaking proficiency of tenth grade students at SMK Negeri 7 Watampone. Using a single-group pre-test-post-test design, the results showed statistically significant improvements in three main indicators: accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The most prominent improvement was observed in comprehension, reflecting increased clarity and shared understanding among students during oral interactions.

In addition to the quantitative findings, the study highlights important educational implications. Make-a-Match emerged as an effective and inclusive teaching strategy that promotes student-centered learning, encourages peer collaboration, and supports contextual language development. The method effectively addresses common challenges in EFL classrooms, including speaking anxiety and low self-confidence, by creating an interactive and stress-free learning environment.

The technique is in line with the pedagogical direction of the Merdeka Curriculum, which reinforces core values such as learner autonomy, character building, and contextual learning. This technique also supports the broader objectives of Asta Cita by promoting quality education and the development of communicative competence as essential skills for the 21st century, especially in the context of vocational schools where employability and non-technical skills are essential.

Thus, this study not only confirms the effectiveness of Make-a-Match in improving speaking proficiency, but also provides meaningful insights into the design of innovative, adaptive, and sustainable learning models in language

education. The findings offer practical relevance for teachers, curriculum developers, and education policymakers who are committed to improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning in Indonesia.

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