



Investigate innovative teaching strategies that improve elementary school students' speaking skills in the digital age

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Abstract

This study aims to identify effective strategies for improving the speaking skills of fifth-grade elementary students through innovative pedagogical approaches, technology integration, and socio-emotional support. This research employed a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design. Participants consisted of ten fifth-grade teachers from ten elementary schools or madrasah ibtidaiyah in Pekalongan City selected purposively based on their teaching experience, and twenty students randomly selected from the same classes. Qualitative data were collected through structured interviews and classroom observations, while quantitative data were obtained using four-point Likert-scale questionnaires measuring instructional strategies, student engagement, speaking confidence, and the use of educational technology. The findings show that teachers employ diverse student-centered strategies—such as contextual, cooperative, and collaborative learning, storytelling, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and interactive discussions supported by digital media—to create meaningful speaking opportunities; quantitatively, more than 90% of teachers consistently implemented guided speaking practices that increased participation and 80% of students showed enthusiasm in collaborative speaking activities, although technology integration remained moderate among about 30% of teachers and 40–80% of students still demonstrated limited confidence in individual or spontaneous speaking tasks. These findings highlight the importance of integrating innovative instructional strategies, digital learning technologies, and socio-emotional support in speaking instruction.

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1. Introduction

Speaking skills are fundamental to effective communication, academic success, and socio-emotional development, particularly in primary education (Riad et al., 2023). In elementary classrooms, speaking activities not only develop linguistic competence but also foster students' confidence, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication. Within the Indonesian education system, the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia in primary schools aims to cultivate polite



communication, strengthen students' character, and promote respect for the national language. In the Independent Curriculum, particularly in Phase C learning outcomes for fifth grade, students are expected to communicate ideas clearly, creatively use vocabulary, and present observations and experiences logically and systematically. These expectations reflect the national commitment to strengthening students' speaking competence as outlined in the BSKAP Head Decree No. 8 of 2022 (BSKAP, 2022). Developing speaking skills at an early stage is therefore essential, as it provides the foundation for advanced literacy and effective communication in later educational stages.

Despite these curricular expectations, many elementary students still experience difficulties in developing adequate speaking skills. Previous studies report that students often feel anxious when speaking in front of their peers, rely heavily on informal language, and show limited confidence in public communication (Ebrahimi et al., 2019). As a result, students' speaking performance frequently falls below the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM). One contributing factor is the persistence of teacher-centered instructional practices that emphasize language theory rather than communicative speaking practice (Permana, 2015; Alviolita & Huda, 2019). Consequently, students have limited opportunities to practice speaking in authentic and meaningful communication contexts.

In addition, contemporary technological developments have introduced new challenges for children's communication development. Excessive use of smartphones and digital media has been associated with decreased inhibitory control, fragmented attention, increased impulsivity, and higher levels of social anxiety (Sunday et al., 2021; Wacks & Weinstein, 2021). These factors may reduce students' willingness to speak publicly and limit opportunities for direct interaction. The situation is further complicated by the limited emphasis on speaking activities within classroom practice and the emergence of negative social dynamics such as verbal bullying, which can undermine students' confidence and classroom engagement (Yang et al., 2021). These conditions highlight the urgent need for instructional approaches that can actively engage students in meaningful speaking activities while supporting their socio-emotional development.

Previous research has explored several instructional approaches that can improve students' speaking abilities. Storytelling techniques have been shown to increase students' confidence and engagement in oral communication (Nguyen & Phillips, 2022; Santoso et al., 2023), while debate simulations can strengthen students' argumentative skills (Mokhtar et al., 2020). Technology-supported learning tools, such as voice-recording applications, have also been found to help students evaluate and improve their speaking performance (Wang & Torrisi-Steele, 2015). Similarly, interactive social media platforms have demonstrated

potential in increasing speaking confidence in higher education contexts (Dewi, 2023). In addition, constructive feedback and collaborative group work have been recognized as important factors in creating supportive environments for speaking practice (Sallang & Ling, 2019; Baria & Gomez, 2022).

However, most previous studies focus on secondary or higher education contexts, while empirical research examining speaking instruction in Indonesian elementary classrooms remains relatively limited. Furthermore, existing studies often examine instructional strategies or digital technology separately rather than integrating them with socio-emotional learning and cognitive development perspectives. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive approach that simultaneously considers pedagogical strategies, technological support, and students' developmental characteristics.

From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's cognitive development theory suggests that elementary school children learn most effectively through social interaction and meaningful experiences. At this stage, language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a cognitive instrument for organizing thoughts and constructing knowledge (Ilhami, 2022). Therefore, integrating innovative instructional strategies with technology-supported learning environments can provide richer opportunities for students to participate in interactive discussions that align with their cognitive development (Hariyasasti, 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study investigates effective strategies for developing the speaking skills of fifth-grade elementary students through innovative instructional approaches, technology integration, and socio-emotional support. By combining qualitative and quantitative data from teachers and students, this study seeks to identify instructional practices that can enhance students' speaking participation, confidence, and communication competence. This study contributes to the literature by integrating pedagogical innovation, digital learning technologies, and cognitive developmental perspectives within the context of elementary language education. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in improving speaking instruction in contemporary elementary classrooms.

2. Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of speaking skills teaching strategies in fifth-grade elementary classrooms. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it allows researchers to combine the strengths of quantitative data, which provide measurable trends, with qualitative data that offer deeper insights into participants' experiences and classroom contexts

(Creswell & Clark, 2018). The research design followed a convergent parallel model, in which qualitative data (interviews and classroom observations) and quantitative data (questionnaires) were collected simultaneously. Both datasets were analyzed independently and subsequently integrated to compare findings and obtain a more comprehensive interpretation of the results.

The participants consisted of two groups. The first group included ten fifth-grade teachers from ten different elementary schools located in an urban area. The teachers were selected using purposive sampling based on their teaching experience and involvement in teaching speaking skills in Indonesian language classes. The characteristics of the teacher participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Participants.

Teacher	Gender	Length of Teaching (Years)
T1	Male	18
T2	Male	5
T3	Male	5
T4	Female	4
T5	Male	2.5
T6	Male	10
T7	Male	2
T8	Female	11.3
T9	Female	10
T10	Female	17

Source: Researcher (2023)

The second group consisted of twenty fifth-grade students from the same schools. Students were selected using simple random sampling to ensure diversity in learning experiences and classroom participation. General student characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Characteristics of participating students (summary).

Gender	Number	Average Age (Years)	Age Range (Years)
Male	10	10.6	10–11
Female	10	10.5	10–11
Total	20	10.55	10–11

Source: Researcher (2023)

Data were collected through two main techniques. Qualitative data were obtained through structured interviews with teachers and classroom observations. The interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to examine teacher–student interactions, instructional strategies, and students' participation during speaking activities.

Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to teachers and students. The teacher questionnaire consisted of 20 items using a four-point Likert scale that measured the frequency of instructional strategies, perceptions of student engagement, and the effectiveness of speaking instruction. The student questionnaire explored students' perceptions of speaking

comfort, participation in speaking activities, and the use of digital learning media in the classroom.

Data analysis was conducted according to the type of data collected. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify key themes related to speaking instruction practices. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including percentage distribution and mean scores for each questionnaire item, in order to identify patterns in teachers' instructional practices and students' engagement levels. Finally, the results of qualitative and quantitative analyses were integrated and compared to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective strategies for developing students' speaking skills.

3. Results

This section presents the research findings based on the focus of the research questions, including innovative teaching strategies, teacher instructional practices, student engagement, and students' perceived difficulties and preferences in speaking activities. Data were obtained from interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, and documentation. The findings are presented through tables and supported by qualitative explanations and selected participant statements to provide a clearer interpretation of the results.

3.1 Innovative teaching strategies and practices

Data obtained from interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations indicate that teachers apply various instructional approaches to develop students' speaking skills. These approaches include contextual learning, cooperative and collaborative learning, discussion-based learning, as well as strategies such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), storytelling, and interactive discussions. These strategies are generally designed to encourage active student participation and to provide opportunities for students to practice speaking in meaningful contexts.

In addition, teachers reported that digital technologies, such as interactive media and online platforms, support the implementation of these instructional strategies. The integration of technology enables teachers to design more engaging learning activities, such as video presentations, virtual discussions, and digital storytelling, which can stimulate students' creativity and participation in speaking tasks. Students are also encouraged to record their speaking performances, evaluate their pronunciation and fluency, and gradually improve their communication skills. Table 3 summarizes the variety of teaching methods applied by teachers in speaking instruction.

Table 3.

Learning methods used by teachers.

Teacher	Learning Methods in the Speaking Skills Aspect
T1	Lectures and practice
T2	Contextual, cooperative, collaborative, and discussion
T3	Problem-Based Learning and Jigsaw Method
T4	Storytelling
T5	Practice
T6	Project-Based Learning
T7	Interactive learning
T8	Discussion, storytelling, Q&A
T9	Q&A, presentation, reading aloud
T10	Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, contextual learning

Source: Interview and Classroom Observation Data (2023)

Table 3 indicates that teachers rarely rely on a single instructional method. Instead, they tend to combine several strategies to create more interactive speaking activities. Teachers reported that collaborative and discussion-based activities are particularly helpful in encouraging students to participate in oral communication.

3.2 Teacher activities in the speaking skills learning process

Results from the teacher questionnaire indicate that most teachers perceived their instructional practices in developing students' speaking skills as being in the "good" or "very good" categories.

Table 4.

Teacher activities in the speaking skills learning process.

No	Statement	Not enough	Enough	Good	Very good
1	The teacher asks about the speaking material that the students like.	0%	0%	90%	10%
2	The teacher delivers the speaking material that will be discussed	0%	0%	90%	10%
3	Teachers share digital media-based speaking materials	0%	30%	70%	0%
4	The teacher divides the class into small groups	0%	10%	80%	10%
5	The teacher gives examples of speaking and asks questions related to the material.	0%	0%	100%	0%
6	The teacher guides students to write and read speaking material in front of the class.	0%	10%	70%	20%
7	The teacher guides the group to practice speaking before going forward.	0%	0%	90%	10%
8	Teachers help students prepare speaking aids, dialogues, or discussions.	0%	30%	70%	0%

9	The teacher guides students to conclude the speaking material	0%	10%	90%	0%
10	The teacher allows students to express their feelings after speaking.	0%	0%	100%	0%

Source: Teacher Questionnaire Data (2023)

The results show that teachers consistently encourage students to participate in speaking activities. For example, 90% of teachers reported that they frequently ask students about speaking topics they are interested in and clearly explain the speaking materials to be discussed. In addition, all teachers (100%) indicated that they provide examples of speaking and encourage students to express their feelings after completing speaking activities.

However, some aspects still require improvement. Approximately 30% of teachers reported that the use of digital media and the preparation of speaking aids were only implemented at a moderate level. This finding suggests that although teachers recognize the importance of technology-supported speaking instruction, its implementation may still be influenced by classroom conditions and available resources. Overall, these results indicate that teachers play an active role in facilitating speaking practice through structured guidance, collaborative activities, and supportive feedback.

3.3 Student involvement in speaking and learning

Based on classroom observations and student questionnaires, student engagement in speaking activities shows varied levels of participation.

Table 5.

Student activities in the speaking skills learning process.

No	Statement	Not enough	Enough	Good	Very good
1	Students are enthusiastic about reading and the speaking material chosen by the teacher.	0%	20%	60%	20%
2	Students are enthusiastic about practising speaking in groups.	0%	10%	80%	10%
3	Students enthusiastically come forward to speak in front of the class	0%	40%	40%	20%
4	Students pay attention to the teacher's speaking example	0%	10%	100%	0%
5	Students dare to ask questions related to the speaking material	0%	50%	50%	0%
6	Students write and read material in front of the class	0%	70%	30%	0%
7	Students dare to speak in front of the class seriously	0%	80%	20%	0%
8	Students use aids when speaking/discussing	0%	30%	70%	0%
9	Students conclude the speaking material	0%	80%	20%	0%
10	Students express feelings after speaking	0%	0%	100%	0%

Source: Student Questionnaire Data (2023)

Table 5 indicates that many students demonstrate positive engagement in speaking activities, particularly when learning takes place in collaborative settings. For example, 80% of students showed enthusiasm when practicing speaking in groups, and all students reported paying attention to the teacher's speaking demonstrations.

However, some aspects of speaking participation remain challenging for students. A relatively large proportion of students reported hesitation when speaking in front of the class. For instance, 40% of students rated their willingness to come forward and speak as only "enough," while 80% indicated that they were not fully confident speaking seriously without preparation. These findings suggest that although students are interested in speaking activities, they may still experience anxiety when performing individually in front of peers.

Furthermore, activities that require higher cognitive effort, such as summarizing speaking material or presenting written speaking scripts, were also rated relatively lower. This indicates that students may require additional guidance and structured practice to develop more advanced speaking competencies.

3.4 Difficulties, media preferences, and proposed speaking activities

To better understand students' experiences in speaking activities, three students representing different levels of speaking confidence were interviewed. The interviews revealed several challenges related to speaking performance, emotional factors, and preferred learning media.

Student A reported feeling nervous when speaking in front of classmates: "I am often nervous and afraid to speak in front of the class because I am worried about making mistakes and being laughed at by my friends." Student B expressed similar concerns related to memory and attention: "Sometimes I feel awkward and afraid of forgetting the material when many people are watching." Meanwhile, Student C, who demonstrated relatively higher confidence, highlighted difficulties in controlling speech delivery: "Sometimes it is difficult to control my intonation and speaking speed, especially when I speak spontaneously."

In addition to describing their difficulties, students also shared their preferences for learning media and speaking activities. Students generally preferred visually engaging and interactive learning materials, such as videos, illustrated stories, educational games, and simulation activities. Table 6 summarizes the main findings from the student interviews.

Table 6.

Summary of interview results with three students

Student	Main Difficulties	Media Preferences	Activity Proposal
A	Nervous and afraid of making mistakes, worried about being laughed at, having difficulty constructing sentences, and speaking clearly	Pictures, videos, illustrated stories	Role play, small group presentations
B	Awkward and afraid of forgetting material, difficulty remembering the sequence of ideas, and a lack of eye contact	Educational games, interactive whiteboards, picture quizzes	Practice short speaking sessions regularly
C	Difficulty controlling intonation, speech rate, and spontaneous word choice	Songs, motivational videos, and interview simulations	Alternating speaking practice with constructive feedback

Source: Student Questionnaire Data (2023)

Overall, the interview findings suggest that emotional support, engaging learning media, and gradual speaking practice are important factors in supporting students' speaking development. Activities such as role-playing, small-group presentations, and regular speaking exercises appear to help students feel more comfortable and confident when participating in classroom speaking activities.

4. Discussion

4.1 Innovative teaching strategies and practices

Research findings indicate that teachers consistently implement active, communicative, and innovative instructional strategies in teaching speaking skills. Based on interview, survey, and observation data, the most frequently applied approaches include contextual learning, cooperative and collaborative learning, and discussion-based activities. These strategies are complemented by instructional models such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), storytelling, and interactive discussions. These approaches emphasize student participation and create opportunities for learners to practice speaking in meaningful and authentic communication contexts.

The integration of digital technologies, such as interactive media, online platforms, video presentations, and virtual discussions, further enriches the learning process. Teachers also encourage students to record their speaking performances and reflect on their pronunciation, fluency, and clarity of expression. This reflective practice allows students to become more aware of their communication skills and gradually improve their speaking performance.

These instructional strategies align with students' cognitive developmental stages and intrinsic motivation, making learning more engaging and meaningful. From a cognitive development perspective, interactive learning activities provide

scaffolding that supports students in constructing knowledge through social interaction, consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. For example, teacher T3 combined the Jigsaw method with digital platforms to create a collaborative learning environment that encouraged students to express their ideas and participate in group discussions (Cochon Drouet et al., 2023). Similarly, the storytelling method implemented by T4 proved effective in improving students' speaking fluency, which supports the findings of previous studies (Yaghoubi & Shaeri, 2019; Santoso et al., 2023; Cahyanti & Nuroh, 2023). These results suggest that integrating collaborative learning and digital tools can provide diverse opportunities for students to practice speaking in supportive classroom environments.

4.2 Teacher activities in the speaking skills learning process

The self-assessment survey results reinforce these findings, with most teachers rating their instructional practices as "good" or "very good" across several indicators. Teachers reported that they frequently ask students about their preferred speaking topics, which helps align classroom activities with students' interests. Understanding students' interests can increase intrinsic motivation and encourage active participation in speaking activities (Filgona et al., 2020).

Similarly, teachers reported presenting speaking materials in a clear and structured manner. Clear instructional guidance allows students to better understand the purpose and structure of speaking tasks, which can reduce uncertainty during speaking activities (Cheon et al., 2020). Teachers also reported dividing students into small groups to facilitate interaction and increase opportunities for speaking practice.

Another important practice observed in the study was teacher modeling. All teachers indicated that they provided examples of speaking and asked questions related to the material. Teacher modeling plays a crucial role in language learning because students often develop speaking competence by observing and imitating effective communication patterns. These findings suggest that integrating innovative teaching strategies, structured pedagogical guidance, and supportive feedback can contribute positively to the development of students' speaking skills (Borisenkov et al., 2021; Robillos, 2023; Firdavs, 2024).

4.3 Student involvement in speaking and learning

The findings indicate that modern, technology-supported instructional strategies contribute positively to student engagement in speaking activities, although students' speaking proficiency levels vary. Many students showed enthusiasm when participating in collaborative speaking activities, particularly in group discussions and practice sessions. Group-based activities appear to create

a supportive environment that reduces pressure and allows students to practice speaking more comfortably.

However, the data also indicate that spontaneous speaking remains a challenge for some students. While many students were able to speak fluently when using prepared scripts, fewer students demonstrated confidence when speaking without preparation. This suggests that although instructional strategies have successfully increased participation, the development of spontaneous speaking skills still requires additional practice.

Digital technology appears to help reduce speaking anxiety by allowing students to practice speaking privately before presenting their ideas in front of the class. Nevertheless, a number of students still reported hesitation when speaking publicly. This finding highlights the importance of addressing psychological factors, such as speaking anxiety, in speaking instruction (Nation, 2007; Tze et al., 2022; Adewale & Lazarus, 2025).

Student engagement data further illustrate this pattern. Many students expressed enthusiasm for group-based speaking practice, while fewer students reported confidence when speaking individually in front of the class. This indicates that self-confidence remains an important factor influencing students' participation in speaking activities (Tekman & Yeniasır, 2023).

In addition to confidence, mastery of speaking content also remains a challenge. Some students reported difficulty organizing their ideas and delivering their speech clearly. Furthermore, the use of nonverbal communication elements, such as facial expressions, body language, and intonation, was not yet fully developed among many students. Previous research suggests that effective use of nonverbal communication can strengthen message delivery and improve audience engagement (Carmichael & Mizrahi, 2023). These findings indicate that while innovative teaching strategies and technology-supported learning environments can enhance participation, additional instructional support is needed to strengthen spontaneous speaking, reduce speaking anxiety, and develop students' nonverbal communication skills.

4.4 Difficulties, media preferences, and proposed speaking activities

The findings also indicate that students' speaking development is influenced by emotional, technical, and environmental factors. Interviews with students revealed that anxiety and fear of making mistakes remain common barriers in speaking activities. Some students expressed concern about being laughed at by peers when making errors during speaking tasks. Such emotional factors may reduce students' willingness to participate in oral communication activities.

Students also demonstrated different preferences for learning media and speaking activities. Many students reported enjoying visually engaging materials such as videos, illustrated stories, and interactive games. These findings suggest

that creative learning media can increase students' motivation and make speaking activities more engaging.

Another challenge identified in the study is the tendency of students to switch between Indonesian and local dialects during speaking activities. While this reflects students' linguistic background, it may also influence their ability to develop formal speaking competence. In addition, some students reported experiencing peer teasing or social pressure during classroom speaking activities. These social dynamics may influence students' confidence and participation in speaking tasks. Previous studies highlight the importance of creating a positive and supportive school climate to address such challenges (Waseem & Nickerson, 2024; Parker, 2016).

These findings also align with the principles of deep learning approaches, which emphasize authentic, student-centered learning experiences that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and emotional engagement (Dong, 2022; Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Afifatun, 2025; Ramadhani, 2025; Bulkis et al., 2025; Indra et al., 2025). In the context of speaking instruction, deep learning strategies encourage meaningful dialogue, reflection, and collaboration among students.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest several implications for classroom practice. First, teachers should provide more opportunities for spontaneous speaking activities that allow students to express ideas without relying solely on prepared scripts. Second, speaking instruction should incorporate socio-emotional learning to strengthen students' confidence and communication ethics. Third, the integration of digital learning tools should be balanced with face-to-face interaction to maintain meaningful communication among students. By integrating innovative pedagogical strategies, technological support, and socio-emotional learning, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that support both students' speaking competence and their social development.

5. Conclusion

This study explored effective strategies for developing the speaking skills of fifth-grade elementary students through innovative pedagogical approaches, technology integration, and socio-emotional support. The findings indicate that the use of contextual learning, cooperative and collaborative learning, storytelling, project-based learning, and interactive discussions can create meaningful opportunities for students to practice speaking in supportive classroom environments. These instructional strategies encourage active participation and help students gradually develop confidence and fluency in oral communication. The integration of digital learning technologies, such as video recordings and online platforms, also expands opportunities for speaking practice and reflective

learning. However, the findings reveal that while students show enthusiasm for group-based speaking activities, spontaneous speaking and public speaking confidence remain challenges for some learners. This suggests that effective speaking instruction should not only focus on linguistic competence but also address psychological factors such as speaking anxiety and self-confidence. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of speaking instruction in elementary education by integrating innovative instructional strategies with Vygotsky's cognitive development perspective and technology-supported learning environments.

The study highlights the importance of combining pedagogical innovation, digital learning media, and socio-emotional support to create inclusive and engaging speaking activities. Practically, the findings suggest that teachers should provide more opportunities for spontaneous speaking practice, encourage collaborative learning environments, and balance technology use with direct face-to-face interaction. These strategies can help students develop both communication competence and social-emotional skills that are essential for 21st-century learning. Future research may involve larger participant groups and experimental designs to further examine the effectiveness of specific instructional models in improving students' speaking performance across different educational contexts.

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