



## Applying Peer Scaffolding to Enhance the EFL Vocational Students' Speaking Skills

Ince Dian Aprilyani Azir

incedian@polimedia.ac.id

*Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif, Indonesia*

Received : 26 July 2019; Accepted: 7 September 2019

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.v6.149-157>

### Abstract

The preliminary study showed that the students at English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the vocational higher education context found the speaking skills as the most difficult ones to learn. The students also declared that unsupportive English learning atmosphere in the class used to make the students reluctant to speak. This phenomenon also leads the students to have lack of confidence to speak English in the class. Thus, the researcher conducted experimental research using Peer Scaffolding approach using Vygotsky's theory to check whether it improves the students' speaking skills. The research involves 156 vocational college students in the second semester of Multimedia Study Program at *Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif* Jakarta. After analyzing the data taking from the assessments, interviews, and observation field notes during the study; the findings confirm that the peer scaffolding enhances the speaking skill performances. As the results expose that the peer scaffolding builds the more supportive learning conditions in which the students can give mutual help to improve the speaking exposures, the peer scaffolding is recommended as one of the alternatives to improve the students' speaking skills.

**Keywords:** peer scaffolding, speaking, EFL, vocational

## **Introduction**

English speaking skill, without a doubt, has been compulsory for those who want to be leading in certain areas (Al-Sibai, 2004). In addition, Richard (2008) put the mastery of English speaking as a priority, and Nunan (1995) put it as an essential feature for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Aungwatanakun (1994) also declared that the speaking skill is the most crucial competency that the students need to master as it is the key to communication. Despite the importance, the students encounter many problems in learning and practicing communication. Tuan & Mai (2015) found the students' problems in speaking are inhibition, topical knowledge insufficiency, not high participation, and the effect of mother tongue. Leong & Ahmadi (2017) identified inhibition as the biggest challenge for the students to be competent in English speaking. EFL students are sometimes inhibited as they are afraid to make mistakes and neither ready to be criticized nor ashamed of the classmates' attention. Moreover, Littlewood (2007) added that the language class constructs the hindrances and anxiety of the learners. Those lead to very low participation in the classroom because almost every student is reluctant to speak. In addition, Haidara (2016) identified the psychological problems encountered by the students in speaking practice namely the confidence lack, anxiety, nervousness, worry, shame, and frustration.

That is why teaching speaking has been a big concern for many EFL teachers as the teaching strategies contributing to the speaking skill outcomes. As the successful indicator of the students' competence in communicating in the target well (Nunan, 1995), the English teachers must create any method to improve the students' verbal communication skills. Haidara (2016) also emphasizes that the teachers not only comprehend the students' problems in English speaking but also motivate as well as accommodate them to solve their speaking obstacles. Particularly in the context of Indonesian vocational education, the English teachers are demanded by the Government of Indonesia to emphasize the English teaching on speaking skill as stated in the 2005-2025 Blueprint (Ministry of National Education, 2005). It is also said by Lie (2007) and Di Grapello, Kruse, & Tandon (2011) that the employers highly require not only the technical skill but also the communicative English-speaking skill. Thus, the English learning for vocational context gives priority on developing functional language skills through students' participation in communicative performances (Rido, Ibrahim, & Nambiar, 2015). The learning method also should not make the students be the focus of the learning process (Savignon, 2007). Therefore, it should be focused more on the speaking fluency than the language accuracy, led to be more on the functions of the language than structures, and oral competence should be more emphasized than literary competence (Griffiths, 2011).

As it previously stated that teaching speaking in EFL vocational context is demanded by the government, this research proposes the new method using the Vygotsky's (1978) peer scaffolding theory in teaching speaking to find answers for the research questions: 1) Can the peer scaffolding method improve the EFL vocational students' speaking skills? 2) To what extent does the peer scaffolding method enhance the EFL vocational students' speaking skills?

In answering these questions, the researcher conducted this experimental study using the Vygotsky's (1978) peer scaffolding theory because this has been identified as one of the socio-constructivist teaching technique which is very recommended because it is resourceful and powerful (Clark and Graves, 2004). To optimize the successful results of scaffolding, Vygotsky (1978) use the term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." Simply, it is the knowledge and skill improvement changing from one level to a higher degree. There are six indicators of successful application of scaffolding outlined by Bransford et al (2000): student engagements in being interested to the task; capability to make the task complexity be simplified; the focus and motivation of the students on achieving the target; the differences between the solution from the students and the desired resolution; the decrease amount of students' frustrated feeling and risks; and the representation of the task ideal definition and solution.

In some previous research, Peer scaffolding is mostly studied in the EFL writing context (Laksmi, 2006; Santoso, 2010; Rezaei & Shokrpour, 2011) rather than in other English skills. The study on emphasizing the speaking skills in the EFL Vocational Higher Education (VHE) context has not been conducted. This study seems to be one of the learning sources to fill in the gap in speaking skill research as well as to inform the best practices in the classroom.

## **Method**

The researcher involved 156 vocational college students from five classes in the second semester of Multimedia Study Program at *Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif* as the subject of the research. The method used in this study is experimental study as Moleong (1989) states that it is the best method to find out the effects of the applied condition into individual or groups. As all of the classes in this research are applied the peer scaffolding method, the researcher used the single group pattern as this study does not have the controlled group and the experiments are focused on the pre-test and post-test results (Bungin, 2005).

The quantitative data taken from assessments (pre/post- tests) results and observations during one study term were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the improvements of students' speaking skills after applying peer

scaffolding learning method. Then the qualitative data from the interviews will be analyzed through the content analysis method to strengthen the quantitative findings.

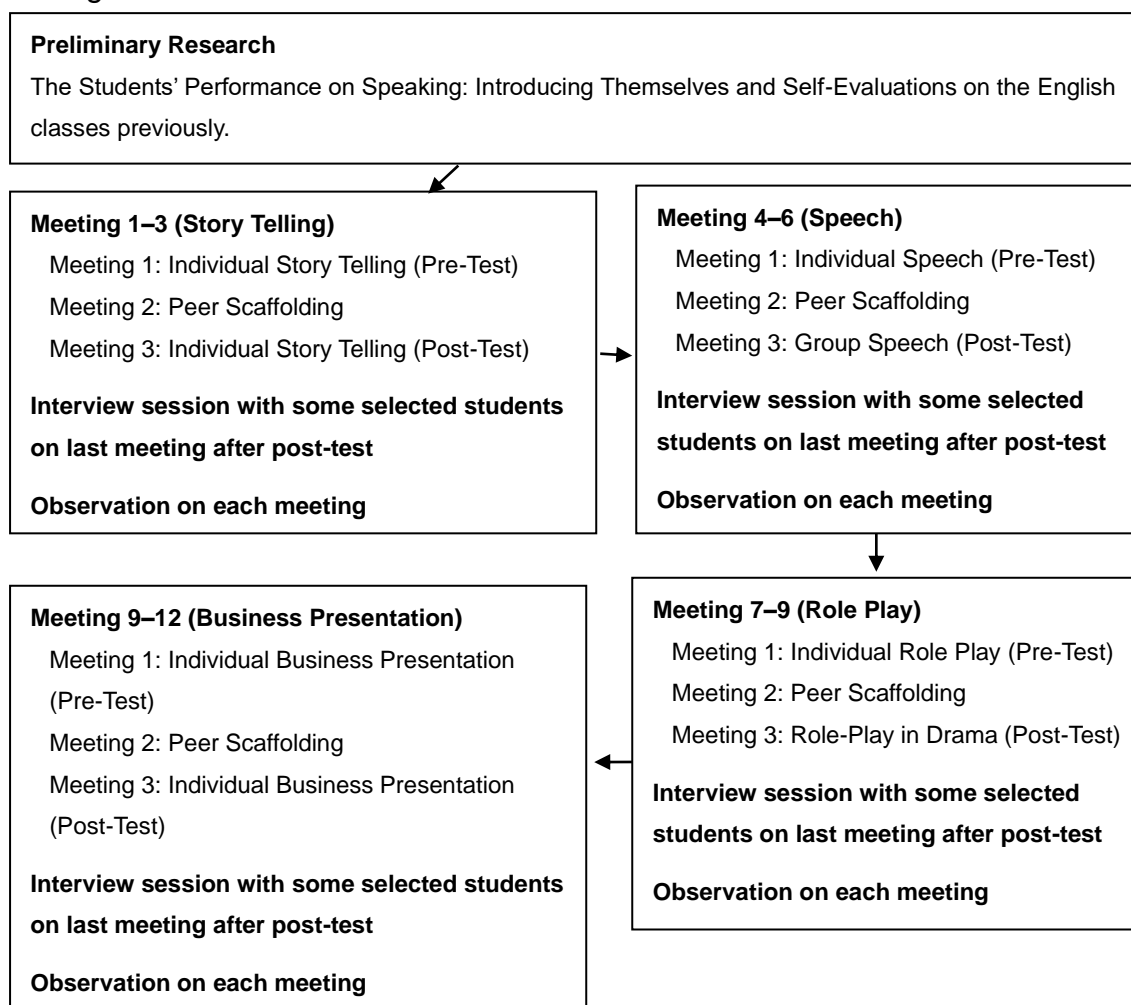


Figure 1. *Research Procedure*

The twelve meetings are grouped into four different speaking tasks of implementing the peer scaffolding in the English speaking-based classrooms. Each meeting uses the differently communicative English-speaking tasks: Story Telling, Speech, Role Play, and Business Presentation. Every meeting comprises three meetings where the teachers conduct the individual task as the pre-test on the first meeting. Then, the teacher grouped the students to have peer scaffolding before the student has the individual performance on the next meeting. On each meeting, the teacher as the observer took some notes to be evaluated and to be put on the questions of interviews. The researcher also conducted the semi-structured interview at the last meeting after post-test. The interviews were conducted with the selected students from the highest and the lowest performance score from each class to give feedbacks and self-evaluations.

## Results and Discussion

Vygotsky (1978) made the term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to optimize the successful results of scaffoldings. Applying the peer scaffolding in this study shows that the learners achieve the optimal ZPD by being less speaking into more communicative teaching with some improvements not only on the English-speaking skills but also on the soft skills related to being more confident, more cooperative, and more motivated to practice the English-speaking skills. The successful application of peer scaffolding in improving all the students' performance scores is not only indicated by the significantly improved scores on post-tests but also the other indicators proposed by Bransford et al. (2000). Four biggest of six indicators of successful application of scaffolding outlined by Bransford et al. (2000) revealed by the students during the study: higher student engagements and interests to the task, simplification of the complex tasks, increased focus and motivation to achieve the target and the declines of the students' frustrated feeling.

The results of applying the peer scaffolding in this study confirmed that the students' speaking skills enhanced. The improvement could be shown in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test described in this table:

Table 1. The Mean Score

No.	Speaking Skills	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1.	Story Telling	70	78
2.	Speech	75	85.5
3.	Role Play	80	90
4.	Business Presentation	83	92

On the average, the improvement of the mean score at first task speaking skill performance: Story Telling was from 70 on pre-test to 78 on post-test. The students revealed in the interview sessions that their performances on pre-test are not as good as the post-test performances because of some reasons. The biggest three reasons were nerves, no inspiration ideas, and lack of confidence during the pre-test. These big problems were reduced by peer scaffolding on the second meeting because they could provide help and motivation for each other to focus on better performances at the last meeting of the meeting. Peer scaffolding was able to decrease the number of frustrated feelings which made the nervous feeling when their ideas were stuck what to tell. Therefore, at last meeting of the Story Telling task, the students show more engaged and interested in their story than before. To sum up, the students agree that peer scaffolding helps them a lot to have better English-speaking skill performance in storytelling.

On the next speaking task, the researcher used the Speech as one of the communicative skills. The mean score was in the 5.5 differences between the pre-test (75) and post-test (85.5). Although there are some improvements in the speech performances after applying the peer scaffolding method, the students

Azir:

*Applying Peer Scaffolding to Enhance the EFL Vocational Students' Speaking Skills*

admitted that speech is more complicated than the previous English-speaking task. Thus, during the peer scaffolding, every student has more increasing focus on simplifying the complex task in speech components. The students claimed that they have improving skills on speech after their interests are concentrated on understanding the speech structures to make the ideas more organizable and systematic. Peer scaffolding lifts the students' confidences and creativity up.

The third speaking task was to conduct the Role Play task in the classroom. At the first meeting, the students created the character with its description to be presented individually in front of the class. The mean score for the pre-tests is 80 as the students are basically interested in making their imaginative and fictional characters. Then, they were surprised when the peer scaffolding techniques applied to do the role play in a group of five to six members. The challenge was to connect each character into logical story construction from individual role to the group story of other roles. After getting the peer scaffolding, the students had higher motivation and interests to make all the characters connected each other into one logical story. They revealed that this task target was challenging that lift their creativity up. Some genres found on the group presentations ranging from funny story to horror myth with all the character roles in the group. The students' performances on this third task were significantly improved from 80 on pre-test mean score to 90 on post-test mean score. The students mentioned that the raising score because peer scaffolding on this task creates more fun learning that the students do not feel any frustrated feeling at all.

The last speaking task is the Business Presentation in which the students need to formulate their own business plans to have greater business presentation in the classroom. The business presentation uses the persuasive languages because the classroom was set into the business pitching competition where the students must present the business ideas to convince the listeners as the investors to take part in their business. At pre-test of this cycle, the students reached the mean score 83. The students find the challenges on how to create persuasive languages to the listeners, so at their first performance in pre-test almost all the students were afraid and worried that their business ideas were not interesting. As peer scaffolding creates a more supportive learning atmosphere, all business ideas were accepted that made the students motivated to develop their ideas to be more persuasive. The students expressed that after the peer scaffolding learning method applied in the second meeting of the last task, they can expand their business ideas using more persuasive languages. Like all the previous findings in other tasks, this last performance surely improves the speaking skill in business presentation performance as shown in mean scores from 83 up to 92.

Overall, the results of applying peer scaffolding enhance the mean scores of speaking skill performance in the vocational higher education classrooms. The

students claimed that peer scaffolding is basically about creating more supportive learning conditions where students can help each other to achieve the target. The study also reflected the indicators of successful application of scaffolding outlined by Bransford et al. (2000): higher student engagements and interests to the task, simplification of the complex tasks, increased focus and motivation to achieve the target, and the declines of the students' frustrated feeling.

## **Conclusion**

The results of applying the peer scaffolding in speaking improved the students' speaking skills in the vocational higher education context. Thus, the peer scaffolding application in the study achieves the optimal Zone Proximal Development (ZPD) shown by 2 points of being into becoming. First, the students are moved from being less communicative into more communicative in speaking performance. Another point is that the results of the test, from being 70 – 83 into becoming higher around 78 – 92. All the students got higher scores in English speaking post-test significantly. Therefore, the application of the peer scaffolding can be considered as an alternative way to improve the EFL vocational higher education students' context because it provides the interactions between students to give mutual help to progress.

There are two important implications for the speaking skills enhancement, notably in the vocational higher education context which focuses on speak communicatively. The first implication derived from this study is that the peer scaffolding potentially benefits the students to have greater speaking exposures in learning and teaching speaking to each other. This approves the peer scaffolding theory of Vygotsky (1978) that the more guidance from more capable peers, the more students perform excellently beyond their ZPD. The second implication is that integrating the peer scaffolding into English speaking lesson plans should be recommended to strengthen the students' confidence and better performance in speaking classes. This is because peer scaffolding can create more supportive learning for students, so the students are no longer reluctant to speak English in the classroom.

Even though this research proves that peer scaffolding significantly increases the students' speaking skills performance, rigorous research is highly needed, especially in the vocational higher education classrooms. For further research, this study is hoped that there will be more peer scaffolding techniques applied to other English skills as well as informing the best practices of peer scaffolding with different settings.

## **References**

- Al-Sibai, D. (2004). Promoting oral fluency of second language learners: Educational linguistics Department of English. *King Saud University. Adult Learners of English*.

Azir:

*Applying Peer Scaffolding to Enhance the EFL Vocational Students' Speaking Skills*

- Aungwatanakun, S. (1994) *English Teaching Methodology, (2nd)*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2000). *How people learn*, Vol. 11. Washington, DC: National academy press.
- Bungin, B. (2005). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif [Quantitative Research Method]* (2nd ed.). Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group.
- Clark, K. F., & Graves, M. F. (2005). Scaffolding students' comprehension of text. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(6), 570-580.
- Di Gropello, E., Kruse, A., & Tandon, P. (2011). *Skills for the labor market in Indonesia: trends in demand, gaps, and supply*. The World Bank.
- Griffiths, C. (2011). The traditional/communicative dichotomy. *ELT Journal*, 65(3), 300-308.
- Haidara, Y. (2016). Psychological Factor Affecting English Speaking Performance for the English Learners in Indonesia. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(7), 1501-1505.
- Laksmi, E. D. (2006). "Scaffolding" students' writing in EFL class: implementing process approach. *TEFLIN Journal*, 17(2), 144-156.
- Leong, L. M., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2017). An analysis of factors influencing learners' English speaking skill. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2(1), 34-41.
- Lie, A. (2007). Education policy and EFL curriculum in Indonesia: Between the commitment to competence and the quest for higher test scores. *TEFLIN Journal*, 18(1), 01-15.
- Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 40(3), 243-249.
- Ministry of National Education. (2005). *Rencana Pendidikan Nasional Jangka Panjang 2005-2025 [National Education Plan 2005-2025]*. Jakarta: Ministry of National Education Republic of Indonesia.
- Moleong, L. J. (1989). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif [Qualitative Research Method]*. Bandung: Remadja Karya.
- Nunan, D. (1995). Closing the gap between learning and instruction. *Tesol Quarterly*, 29(1), 133-158.
- Rezaei, M., & Shokrpour, N. (2011). Teacher Vs. Peer Scaffolding Modes in L2 Writing Classes: a Consideration of Genre Approach to Writing. *Indonesian JELT*, 7(2), 40-64.
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Rido, A., Ibrahim, N., & Nambiar, R. M. (2015). Interaction strategies of master teachers in Indonesian vocational classroom: A case study. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 21(3).
- Santoso, A. (2010). *Scaffolding an EFL (English as a foreign language) 'effective writing' class in a hybrid learning community*. Doctoral dissertation, Queensland University of Technology.



- Savignon, S. J. (2007). Beyond communicative language teaching: What's ahead?.  
*Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(1), 207-220.
- Tuan, N. H., & Mai, T. N. (2015). Factors affecting students' speaking performance at Le Thanh Hien high school. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 8-23.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Readings on the Development of Children*, 23(3), 34-41.