

IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY THROUGH THE FOCUS ON FORM APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether the Focus on Form (FonF) approach improved students' speaking ability at the second grade of MAN 2 Barru. The research responded to students' limited oral practice, anxiety, grammatical inaccuracy, restricted vocabulary, and hesitation in classroom speaking. A quantitative pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design was applied. Twenty students were selected from the second-grade population through simple random sampling. The instruments consisted of speaking tests and an observation checklist. The treatment used WH-question materials integrated with communicative practice and corrective feedback, including recast, elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition. The findings showed that the students' mean score increased from 30.4 in the pre-test to 62.8 in the post-test. The standard deviation decreased from 7 to 3, indicating more consistent achievement after treatment. The t-test value was 3.19, which was higher than the t-table value of 1.743 at the 5% significance level. The results indicate that FonF significantly improved students' speaking ability, especially in fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and grammatical accuracy.

Keywords: Communicative Approach, Focus on Form, Speaking Ability, WH-Question

INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability remains a central concern in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom because learners are expected to express ideas, feelings, and information orally in real interaction. Recent studies show that students' speaking performance is shaped by fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and confidence (Annisa & Wariyati, 2023; Gunasekaran & Subramaniam, 2022; Cendra, 2022); limitations in these areas often appear together with speaking anxiety, hesitation, and restricted oral practice in EFL classrooms (Chen et al., 2022; Irawan et al., 2022; Mamang et al., 2023; Marpaung & Fithriani, 2023). Accordingly, speaking instruction should not only explain grammar but also provide repeated opportunities for meaningful oral production, peer interaction, and teacher support so that students can move from knowing language forms to using them in communication (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023; M.-R. A. Chen & Hwang, 2020).

The Focus on Form (FonF) approach offers a pedagogical response to this issue because it links attention to linguistic form with meaningful communication. Recent FonF-based research positions the approach as instruction that integrates attention to linguistic form, meaning, and communication rather than treating grammar as detached rules (Bahari, 2019; Rassaei, 2020). In this logic, learners are encouraged to notice and repair problematic forms while they are still involved in communicative tasks. Such integration is relevant to speaking classes because students need both accuracy and fluency when asking questions, responding to peers, and producing short classroom conversations (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023; Sitepu & Indari, 2021).

Corrective feedback is an important mechanism in FonF instruction. Recent studies of oral corrective feedback in EFL classrooms show that teachers and students generally value feedback when it helps learners recognize errors without completely interrupting communication (Ha et al., 2021; Ha & Nguyen, 2021). Feedback strategies such as recast, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification requests, and repetition can support noticing, self-repair, and more accurate oral production when they are adjusted to the classroom context (Ha et al., 2021; Rassaei, 2020). Empirical work also shows that FonF and communicative speaking tasks can support listening-speaking proficiency, engagement, vocabulary development, and students' willingness to participate (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023; Bahari, 2019).

Despite these findings, students at the second grade of MAN 2 Barru still experienced difficulty in speaking English naturally. The preliminary situation described in the original thesis indicates that students lacked practice partners, needed too much time to organize ideas before speaking, felt afraid of making mistakes, and showed limited confidence in producing English questions and answers. These problems are consistent with recent Indonesian EFL findings that speaking anxiety, fear of error, limited preparation, and pronunciation concerns can restrict learners' willingness to speak (Alimoradi & Adib, 2022; Mamang et al., 2023; Marpaung & Fithriani, 2023). WH-question material was selected because it directly encourages students to ask, answer, and build short conversations, and recent evidence indicates that students' understanding of WH-questions is related to their speaking ability in asking and giving opinions (Sitepu & Indari, 2021). This study therefore aimed to determine the difference in students' speaking ability before and after being taught through FonF and to describe how the approach helped students increase their speaking ability through communicative practice and feedback.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a quantitative pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test model. The design was selected because it enabled the researcher to compare students' speaking ability before and after the FonF treatment within the same group. Quantitative designs are appropriate when numerical data are used to examine changes in measured variables, and pre-test/post-test logic is commonly used to document learning improvement after an intervention when a control class is not available (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; M.-R. A. Chen & Hwang, 2020).

The research was conducted at MAN 2 Barru, Lakalitta, Cilellang Selatan, Barru Regency. The population consisted of 92 second-grade students. The sample comprised 20 students selected through simple random sampling. The independent variable was the implementation of the Focus on Form approach, while the dependent variable was students' speaking ability. The research focused on WH-question material as the target language form because this form directly supports classroom questioning, answering, and short conversational exchanges.

The instruments consisted of a speaking test and an observation checklist. The speaking test was administered twice: a pre-test before the treatment and a post-test after the treatment. Students were assessed through four aspects: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical accuracy. These aspects reflect common components used to evaluate students' speaking performance in recent EFL assessment literature, where oral performance is judged through fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and related communicative indicators (Irawan et al., 2022; Mamang et al., 2023). The data were analyzed using mean score, percentage, standard deviation, and t-test calculation to determine the difference between pre-test and post-test performance.

The treatment was implemented in four meetings, each lasting approximately 80 minutes. The first meeting introduced FonF and WH-question material, followed by short conversation practice and feedback. The second meeting used audio-based discussion and group interaction. The third meeting used picture-based speaking to stimulate questions, answers, and storytelling. The fourth meeting expanded the practice through question tags and interactive classroom correction. During the treatment, the researcher applied recast, elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition as feedback strategies. These strategies were used to maintain communication while helping students notice grammatical and pronunciation errors (Ha et al., 2021; Rassaei, 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed a clear increase in students' speaking ability after the implementation of the FonF approach. The total pre-test score was 608, while the total post-test score reached 1255. The mean score increased from 30.4 to 62.8, and the standard deviation decreased from 7 to 3. This decline in standard deviation indicates that the students' speaking achievement became more consistent after the treatment. The statistical test also confirmed that the t-test value was 3.19, which was higher than the t-table value of 1.743 at the 5% level of significance.

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Test	Total Score	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Pre-test	608	30.4	7	Low initial speaking ability
Post-test	1255	62.8	3	Improved speaking ability
Significance test	-	t-test = 3.19	t-table = 1.743	t-test > t-table

The classification of students' achievement also shifted substantially. Before treatment, 19 students (95%) were classified as poor and only one student (5%) reached the fair category. After treatment, no student remained in the poor category. Fifteen students (75%) reached the good category and five students (25%) reached the fair category. This pattern indicates that the intervention did not merely raise the average score but also moved most students from low performance to a more functional speaking category.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Speaking Ability Classification

Classification	Score Range	Pre-Test Frequency	Post-Test Frequency	Change
Very good	81-100	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	No change
Good	61-80	0 (0%)	15 (75%)	Substantial increase
Fair	41-60	1 (5%)	5 (25%)	Increase
Poor	21-40	19 (95%)	0 (0%)	Eliminated
Very poor	0-20	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	No change

The improvement can be explained by the structure of the treatment. The FonF approach created a communicative classroom in which students were encouraged to produce WH-questions, answer peers' questions, and respond to teacher feedback. Students did not only memorize grammatical rules; they practiced using forms in interaction. This finding supports recent FonF research showing that attention to form becomes more pedagogically useful

when it is connected to meaning-focused communication and speaking practice (Bahari, 2019; Rassaei, 2020). It also aligns with communicative speaking-task research showing that structured speaking activities can improve learners' speaking skills and classroom engagement (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023).

Observation data further indicated that students became more willing to speak as the meetings progressed. At the beginning, students tended to be shy, silent, and afraid of mispronunciation or grammatical errors. After repeated practice with feedback, students began to ask questions, answer peers' questions, correct mistakes, and participate more confidently. This classroom pattern is consistent with studies showing that speaking anxiety and fear of mistakes can hinder oral performance, while structured practice, peer interaction, and supportive feedback can help students build confidence and improve speaking performance (I.-J. Chen et al., 2022; M.-R. A. Chen & Hwang, 2020; Marpaung & Fithriani, 2023).

The use of corrective feedback was particularly important. Recast helped students hear corrected versions of their utterances, elicitation pushed them to reformulate their own sentences, and metalinguistic clues helped them understand why a form was incorrect. These findings reinforce recent oral corrective feedback research showing that learners and teachers value feedback that improves accuracy while still respecting the flow of speech (Ha et al., 2021; Ha & Nguyen, 2021). The result also corresponds with recent evidence that recasts and other FonF techniques can support L2 development by drawing learners' attention to problematic forms (Rassaei, 2020).

The result also has practical relevance for EFL speaking instruction. The students' progress suggests that speaking classes should include structured interaction, feedback, and target-language forms that are directly usable in conversation. WH-questions were suitable for this purpose because they naturally generate classroom exchanges and make students practice both grammar and meaning. This interpretation is consistent with recent studies indicating that communicative speaking tasks, FonF-oriented activities, and WH-question mastery can support learners' speaking performance, engagement, and classroom communication (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023; Bahari, 2019; Sitepu & Indari, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The Focus on Form approach significantly improved the speaking ability of the second-grade students at MAN 2 Barru. The students' mean score increased from 30.4 in the pre-test to 62.8 in the post-test, while the t-test value of 3.19 exceeded the t-table value of 1.743. This

result shows that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The improvement was also visible in the classification shift: before treatment, 95% of students were in the poor category, while after treatment, 75% reached the good category and 25% reached the fair category.

The practical implication is that English teachers can use FonF as a communicative approach to teach speaking without separating grammar from interaction. Feedback, WH-question practice, and peer interaction can help students become more confident, more accurate, and more fluent. The limitation of this study lies in the use of one group without a control class and a relatively small sample. Future studies should use a larger sample, a control group, and different speaking materials to test the broader effectiveness of FonF in EFL classrooms.

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