



From Silence to Confidence: Improving Students' Speaking through Word Card Media

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Abstract Speaking is one of the most essential yet challenging skills for language learners, especially when limited vocabulary and low confidence restrict their ability to communicate effectively. This Classroom Action Research (CAR) aimed to enhance students' English-speaking skills through the use of word card media. The study involved 15 seventh-grade students of class VII A and followed four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Data were collected through tests, observations, interviews, and questionnaires using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Before the intervention, students showed low confidence, poor vocabulary mastery, and minimal participation. After implementing word card media, students became more active and confident in speaking activities. The mean speaking score increased from 71 to 80, surpassing the Minimum Mastery Criteria. Observations and questionnaire results (overall mean = 3.44) indicated higher motivation, engagement, and positive perceptions of the learning process. The findings demonstrate that word card media effectively improve vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence, while transforming the classroom into a more student-centered and interactive environment. This study also introduces a new concept of multimodal, vocabulary-driven speaking instruction, in which word cards act as interactive cognitive tools that bridge vocabulary learning and communicative use. Future research is recommended to explore digital or gamified word card applications to enhance personalized and engaging speaking practice in various educational contexts.

Keywords: Speaking skills, word card media, classroom action research, vocabulary mastery, student motivation and confidence

INTRODUCTION

Speaking proficiency is a central objective in foreign language education because it enables learners to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and participate in social interaction. In recent EFL research, speaking is increasingly viewed as an integrative skill that requires the simultaneous coordination of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension (Nation & Macalister, 2020; Thornbury, 2017; Ur, 2019). However, at the junior high school level, learners

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often experience considerable difficulty in speaking English due to limited lexical resources and low self-confidence, which in turn restrict their willingness to communicate (Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Teng, 2021). Preliminary observations and interviews conducted at SMP Bhakti Terpadu Malang revealed that many seventh-grade students were reluctant to speak English in front of their peers, struggled to recall appropriate vocabulary, and demonstrated minimal oral participation, indicating a gap between curricular expectations and actual classroom performance.

One contributing factor to this gap is the continued reliance on teacher-centred instructional practices. Despite curriculum demands for communicative competence, speaking instruction in many Indonesian EFL classrooms remains dominated by lectures, textbook-based exercises, and memorization, offering limited opportunities for meaningful oral interaction (Widodo, 2016; Yulianti & Sulisty, 2021). Teachers at SMP Bhakti Terpadu Malang confirmed that speaking lessons were often constrained by time and a lack of engaging instructional media, resulting in passive learning environments. Consequently, students have fewer chances to practise speaking authentically, which negatively affects both fluency development and speaking confidence.

To address these challenges, recent studies emphasize the role of interactive and visual instructional media in promoting student-centred and communicative learning environments. Grounded in multimedia learning theory, visual aids can reduce cognitive load, facilitate vocabulary recall, and enhance learner engagement when integrated meaningfully into classroom activities (Mayer, 2020; Nation & Waring, 2020). One such medium is word card media, which functions as a tangible and multimodal tool that supports vocabulary learning while simultaneously prompting oral interaction. By providing visual and contextual cues, word cards help learners retrieve lexical items more efficiently and encourage spontaneous spoken production (Paris & Salman, 2022; Ramdhani, 2021).

Empirical evidence from the last decade supports the pedagogical value of word cards in EFL contexts. For instance, Krisdiana (2018) demonstrated that combining word cards with communicative activities significantly improved students' speaking performance and confidence. Similarly, Ramdhani (2021) found that flash-card-based instruction increased learners' willingness to ask and answer questions, fostering more interactive classroom discourse. More recently, Sinaga (2023) reported that the use of word cards in a classroom action research design led to notable improvements in students' vocabulary mastery and oral participation at the junior high school level. These findings suggest that word cards not only support vocabulary acquisition but also facilitate a shift toward more communicative and learner-driven classroom interaction.

Within the specific context of SMP Bhakti Terpadu Malang, the combination of low student confidence, limited vocabulary use, and insufficient interactive media highlights the need for targeted pedagogical intervention. Student interviews revealed anxiety when speaking English and a tendency to remain silent during oral activities, while teachers acknowledged difficulties in stimulating sustained student talk. Therefore, introducing word card media was considered a strategic instructional response to enhance vocabulary mastery, increase student talk time, build speaking confidence, and promote fluency in English.

Accordingly, this classroom action research (CAR) was conducted to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of word card media in improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Bhakti Terpadu Malang. The study followed a cyclical process of planning, acting,

observing, and reflecting, consistent with contemporary CAR frameworks (Kemmis et al., 2014; Sagor, 2016). The significance of this study lies in its practical contribution to EFL pedagogy, particularly in demonstrating how simple, low-cost visual media can be used to transform speaking instruction into a more interactive, student-centred learning experience.

METHOD

With the research setting at Bhakti Terpadu Junior High School in Malang, which consisted of 15 students (8 male and 7 female), this study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to address real classroom problems and improve teaching effectiveness, thereby positively affecting learning outcomes. CAR is recognized as a reflective and systematic research methodology that involves practitioners in cycles of planning instructional improvements, implementing those plans, observing the effects, and reflecting on outcomes to inform further cycles of action (Kemmis & McTaggart model; reactive spiral cycle) with each stage interrelated in a continuous process of refinement and development (Ratu et al., 2024; Siregar, 2025).

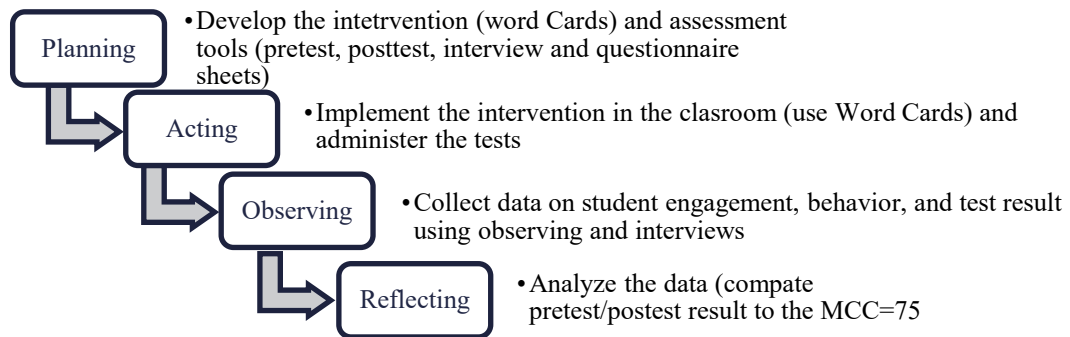


Figure 1. The cyclical process of CAR

The following scheme shows the four interconnected stages of the Classroom Action Research (CAR) cycle used to address learning problems and improve teaching effectiveness. This cycle is iterative, meaning that if the *Reflection* stage reveals insufficient improvement or new problems, a subsequent cycle (Cycle 2, 3, etc.) is initiated, beginning again with *Planning* like showed on Figure 2.

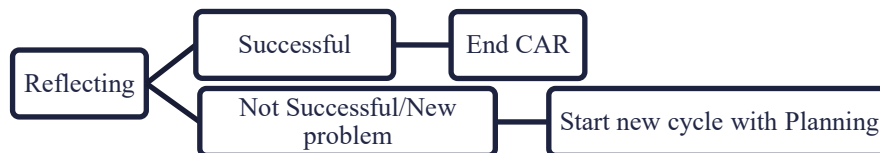


Figure 2. Cycle flow decision

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the principle of continuous improvement through iterative classroom action research (CAR) cycles aimed at addressing classroom learning problems and enhancing instructional effectiveness. CAR is widely recognized as a reflective, practitioner-oriented methodology that enables teachers to plan interventions, implement instructional actions, observe classroom processes, and reflect on outcomes to improve teaching and learning practices (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mertler, 2023). In the planning stage, the researcher prepared instructional materials and research instruments, including lesson plans, observation sheets, interview guides,

questionnaires, and word card media, all designed to integrate vocabulary development with structured speaking practice in line with communicative language teaching principles.

The acting stage involved implementing the planned intervention by administering a pre-test to identify students' initial speaking proficiency, applying word card media during instructional activities, and conducting a post-test to measure learning progress. The observing stage focused on systematically documenting students' engagement, participation, and speaking performance through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. The use of pre-test and post-test designs within CAR is supported by recent EFL research as an effective means of capturing learning gains resulting from instructional interventions (Burns, 2015; Sagor, 2016; Mertler, 2023).

The reflecting stage involved analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Students' pre-test and post-test scores were compared to assess improvement, while observation notes and interview data were examined to identify instructional strengths and challenges. The intervention was considered successful if students' post-test scores met or exceeded the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75; otherwise, further CAR cycles were conducted to address remaining issues. This recursive process reflects contemporary views of CAR as a dynamic, evidence-based approach that allows instructional practices to evolve responsively to classroom needs (Kemmis et al., 2014; Burns, 2022).

To collect comprehensive data, this study employed questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and speaking tests. The 10-item questionnaire captured students' perceptions of learning with word card media and demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.86) following validation using SPSS version 25 (Pallant, 2020). Interviews with teachers and students provided in-depth qualitative insights into instructional challenges and learner engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quantitative data from pre-tests and post-tests were assessed using an analytic speaking rubric measuring fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension, which is recommended in recent EFL assessment research for ensuring detailed and reliable measurement of speaking development (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; Fulcher, 2015). Data triangulation strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

FINDINGS

Planning Stage: Students' Challenge through Speaking Activity

In the first cycle of implementing word card media, the researcher began with a thorough planning phase that involved preparing an interview guide, lesson plan, and the word card learning media. The interview guide contained five questions related to speaking activities and was administered to both teachers and students.

Table 1. Students' and Teacher's response before using word card media

Theme	Student Responses	Teacher's Responses
Speaking Confidence	<i>"I feel nervous when I have to speak English in front of the class."</i> (S7)	<i>"Most students are not confident to speak; they often hesitate and use their first language."</i>

Theme	Student Responses	Teacher's Responses
Vocabulary Mastery	"Sometimes I forget the words when I want to speak." (S2)	"Students have very limited vocabulary, so they often pause or stay silent when asked to speak."
Motivation and Interest	"Speaking lessons are sometimes boring because we only read from the book." (S11)	"It is hard to make students enthusiastic during speaking activities using the textbook."
Learning Media	"We don't use any interesting media, only worksheets and the whiteboard." (S14)	"I rarely use visual media due to limited resources, so the lessons are mostly teacher-centered."
Classroom Interaction	"Only a few students speak; the others just listen." (S4)	"The class is quite passive; only the same students respond when I ask questions."

The interviews revealed that seventh-grade students in class VII A had limited speaking ability in English due to the lack of interactive and engaging media used in class. Before introducing word card media, both students and the teacher expressed several challenges in the English speaking class. Many students admitted feeling nervous when speaking in front of others, saying, "I'm afraid of making mistakes, so I just keep quiet," and "Sometimes I know the answer in Indonesian, but I don't know how to say it in English." This reflected their lack of confidence and limited vocabulary, which hindered their ability to communicate effectively. Some students also mentioned that speaking lessons felt repetitive, explaining that "We only read from the textbook, and it's boring," showing that monotonous activities reduced their motivation. The teacher confirmed these observations, stating, "Most of the students are not confident to speak. Only a few of them participate while others stay silent," and further added, "We rarely use any visual media, so the class becomes less engaging." These consistent responses from both students and the teacher revealed that the lack of interactive and visual learning media was a major factor contributing to students' low participation and enthusiasm. Based on these insights, the researcher decided to implement word card media as an engaging and interactive tool to enhance vocabulary mastery, build confidence, and encourage more active participation in speaking activities during the next CAR cycle.

Acting Stage: Students' Speaking toward the Word Card Media Implementation

In the acting phase, the researcher implemented the lesson plan by conducting classroom activities that encouraged active student participation through the use of word card media. A pre-test was administered before the treatment to assess students' initial speaking abilities, which showed that their skills were still very low, particularly in expressing themselves confidently in front of the class. Subsequently, several learning sessions were carried out using the prepared word cards, where students were given random cards containing words and pictures to stimulate discussion and practice. The clear result show on Table 2 below.

Table 2. Students' pre-test and post-test result on speaking

No	Student	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain (Δ)	Classification (Post-Test)	Statistic	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1	S1	68	78	+10	Good	Mean	71.0	80.0
2	S2	70	80	+10	Good	Median	71	80

No	Student	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain (Δ)	Classification (Post-Test)	Statistic	Pre-Test	Post-Test
3	S3	72	83	+11	Very Good	Highest Score	74	83
4	S4	74	82	+8	Very Good	Lowest Score	68	78
5	S5	69	79	+10	Good	SD	1.9	1.8
6	S6	73	81	+8	Very Good			
7	S7	71	80	+9	Good			
8	S8	70	81	+11	Very Good			
9	S9	68	78	+10	Good			
10	S10	72	83	+11	Very Good			
11	S11	73	82	+9	Very Good			
12	S12	69	79	+10	Good			
13	S13	70	81	+11	Very Good			
14	S14	71	80	+9	Good			
15	S15	72	82	+10	Very Good			

The comparison of pre-test and post-test results on the Table 2 clearly demonstrates the positive effect of using word card media on students' speaking skills. Before the intervention, the average pre-test score was 71, slightly below the 75 Minimum Completeness Criteria, indicating that students were still struggling with fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary recall. Several students showed hesitation and limited word choice when describing objects or people, and their confidence in speaking English remained low.

After the implementation of word card media, the mean post-test score increased to 80, surpassing the MMC and showing an overall improvement of 9 points. The majority of students performed better in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage, and their confidence when speaking in front of the class noticeably improved. This improvement suggests that the visual and interactive nature of the word card media effectively supported students' language production by helping them recall vocabulary more easily and use it in meaningful contexts.

Meanwhile, from the descriptive statistical results indicate a notable improvement in students' speaking performance after the implementation of word card media. The mean score increased from 71.0 to 80.0, showing a clear enhancement in students' overall speaking ability. Similarly, the median score remained consistent with the mean (71 to 80), confirming that the improvement was experienced by most students rather than only a few high achievers. The highest score rose from 74 to 83, while the lowest score increased from 68 to 78, demonstrating that even the lowest-performing students benefited from the intervention. The standard deviation decreased slightly from 1.9 to 1.8, indicating that students' performance became more consistent after the treatment. These findings suggest that the use of word card media not only improved students' average speaking achievement but also helped reduce performance gaps among them. Overall, the results provide strong evidence that word card media effectively enhanced vocabulary recall, fluency, and confidence in speaking English.

Observing Stage: Students' Experience on Word Card Media

During the observation stage, several key behavioral changes and classroom dynamics were noted as a result of implementing word card media. At the beginning of the cycle, students appeared hesitant, quiet, and lacked confidence in speaking English; only a few dared to respond when prompted by the teacher. However, after the introduction of word card activities, the classroom atmosphere became more interactive and enjoyable. Students began showing enthusiasm by volunteering to answer questions, participating in group discussions, and using the word cards actively during speaking practice. They were observed helping one another find suitable words, using English phrases more frequently, and showing visible excitement when recognizing familiar vocabulary on the cards. Moreover, students' pronunciation improved through repeated use of the words during guided speaking tasks, and they started self-correcting errors after feedback. The researcher also observed that students who were previously passive became more engaged and confident, while the overall participation level of the class increased significantly. These observations indicate that the use of word card media not only enhanced vocabulary retention but also transformed the learning environment into a more communicative and student-centered space. This field note result also relate with the questionnaire result.

After implementing the word card media, questionnaire was conducted to assess students' engagement, participation, and progress during speaking activities. These mix qualitative and quantitative findings reveal how students and teachers perceived the effectiveness of the word card media in improving speaking performance.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical results of students' questionnaire responses (n = 15)

No	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
1	I enjoy learning English speaking through word card media.	8	6	1	0	3.47	Strongly Agree
2	The word cards help me remember new vocabulary easily.	7	7	1	0	3.40	Agree
3	Using word cards makes speaking activities more fun and interesting.	9	5	1	0	3.53	Strongly Agree
4	I feel more confident speaking English when using word cards.	6	7	2	0	3.27	Agree
5	The word card activities motivate me to speak in class.	8	6	1	0	3.47	Strongly Agree
6	The teacher gives clear instructions when using word cards.	5	8	2	0	3.20	Agree
7	I can understand the meaning of words more easily with pictures on the word cards.	10	4	1	0	3.60	Strongly Agree
8	Word card activities help me speak more fluently in English.	7	7	1	0	3.40	Agree
9	I like working in pairs or groups using the word cards.	9	5	1	0	3.53	Strongly Agree
10	Overall, the use of word card media helps improve my English-speaking ability.	8	7	0	0	3.53	Strongly Agree

Legend: SA = Strongly Agree (4), A = Agree (3), D = Disagree (2), SD = Strongly Disagree (1)

Table 2. Summary of descriptive statistics

Statistic	Value
Total Items	10
Total Respondents	15

Statistic	Value
Mean Score (Overall)	3.44
Standard Deviation	0.12
Highest Mean	3.60 (Item 7)
Lowest Mean	3.20 (Item 6)

Based on the descriptive statistics, the overall mean score of 3.44 indicates that students generally agreed that the use of word card media effectively improved their speaking skills. The highest-rated statement ($M = 3.60$) was “*I can understand the meaning of words more easily with pictures on the word cards,*” showing that students strongly appreciated the visual aspect of the media. Similarly, high mean scores on items 1, 3, 5, and 10 (ranging from 3.47–3.53) reflect students’ enjoyment, motivation, and belief that word cards improved their English-speaking ability. The lowest mean ($M = 3.20$) for item 6 suggests that although teacher instructions were clear, there is still room for improving the consistency of media use and task explanation.

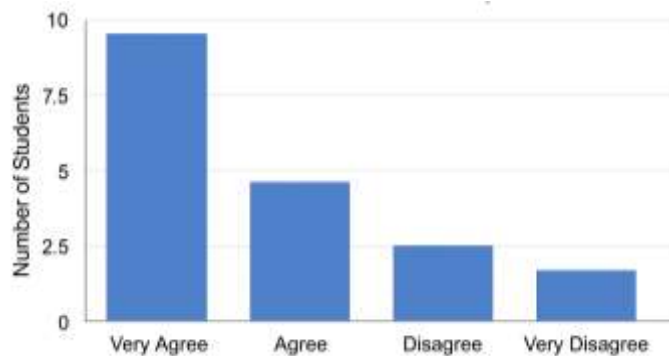


Figure 1. Average student response per questionnaire item

Additionally, the Figure 1 illustrates students’ responses to the questionnaire about using word card media in speaking lessons. It shows that most students strongly agreed or agreed that the use of word cards enhanced their engagement and learning experience. Only a small number of students disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that the overall perception of the word card media was positive and effective in improving speaking skills.

Reflecting Stage: The Data Interpretation

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of word card media effectively enhanced students’ English-speaking skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary use, fluency, and speaking confidence. Recent research in EFL pedagogy emphasizes that visual and interactive learning media facilitate deeper language processing by supporting vocabulary retrieval and pronunciation practice (Mayer, 2020; Nation & Waring, 2020). In this study, the visual and collaborative use of word cards encouraged students to engage actively in group discussions, thereby strengthening both individual speaking competence and social interaction. These results suggest that word cards function as an effective and engaging instructional medium that promotes confidence, fluency, and meaningful communication in speaking lessons.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce contemporary views that interactive and visual media play a crucial role in fostering learner engagement and motivation in language learning. Students who initially demonstrated low confidence and limited vocabulary recall became more active participants during speaking activities after the intervention. This outcome aligns with recent constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, which emphasize that learners develop language through active engagement with meaningful tools and social interaction (Lantolf et al., 2015; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). By presenting vocabulary in a concrete and visual format, word cards helped students connect linguistic input with contextual meaning, thereby supporting comprehension and long-term retention.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings provide consistent evidence of the effectiveness of word card media. The comparison between pre-test and post-test results revealed a notable improvement in students' speaking performance, with most learners exceeding the Minimum Mastery Criteria. Classroom observations further showed increased participation, enthusiasm, and willingness to speak. These findings are consistent with recent empirical studies demonstrating that word-based visual media improve speaking performance and learner confidence in EFL classrooms (Ramdhani, 2021; Sinaga, 2023). Such studies highlight that vocabulary-focused interactive media can transform speaking instruction from passive practice into active language use.

Similarly, this study supports recent research showing that word card activities enhance students' motivation and speaking participation. For instance, Paris and Salman (2022) reported that learners using flashcard-based speaking activities demonstrated higher engagement and reduced anxiety during oral tasks. Likewise, Kaloke et al. (2022) found that junior high school students exposed to word card media showed significant improvements in vocabulary mastery and speaking participation. These findings emphasize the importance of positive emotional engagement in language learning and confirm that interactive media can create a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and oral production.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results align with recent recommendations in communicative language teaching that advocate for the integration of multimodal instructional tools to support speaking development (Harmer, 2015; Widodo, 2016). The use of word cards in this study created a multimodal learning environment that engaged visual, auditory, and social dimensions of learning. As a result, students demonstrated improved sentence construction, clearer pronunciation, and greater confidence during speaking tasks. This confirms recent evidence that combining visual input with communicative practice enhances both linguistic accuracy and fluency (Teng, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

Finally, the findings also resonate with contemporary cognitive and sociocultural theories of language learning, which emphasize mediation, interaction, and learner agency. Recent studies argue that instructional tools such as word cards act as mediating artifacts that support learners' cognitive development and metacognitive awareness (Lantolf et al., 2015; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Observation data from this study indicated that many students reflected on their learning progress, suggesting the development of learner autonomy and self-regulation. This reflective engagement enabled students to monitor their speaking performance and take greater responsibility for their learning, supporting sustainable language development.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the implementation of word card media significantly improves students' speaking performance, particularly in vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. Through the Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which involved planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, the study demonstrated that word cards transformed the learning environment from teacher-centered to student-centered. Students became more active, engaged, and collaborative, while the teacher's role shifted toward facilitator and motivator. Quantitative results showed an increase in the mean speaking score from 71 in the pre-test to 80 in the post-test, while qualitative findings from observations and interviews revealed higher enthusiasm and participation among learners. Beyond these empirical findings, this study introduces a new concept of multimodal vocabulary-driven speaking instruction, where word card media function not only as visual aids but as interactive cognitive tools that connect vocabulary learning with real communication practice.

Therefore, this research contributes to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) by positioning word card media as a holistic multimodal framework that enhances not only linguistic competence but also learner autonomy, motivation, and classroom interaction. Future studies can expand this concept by integrating digital or gamified word card systems to further support adaptive and personalized speaking practice in diverse educational contexts.

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