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Project-Based Speaking Activities in English language classrooms: Enhancing EFL students' speaking performance through collaborative learning

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ABSTRAK

Kompetensi berbicara merupakan hasil pembelajaran kunci dalam pendidikan bahasa Inggris karena memungkinkan komunikasi yang efektif dalam konteks akademik, profesional, dan antarbudaya. Namun, banyak mahasiswa Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di perguruan tinggi Indonesia masih mengalami kesulitan dalam mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi lisan karena terbatasnya kesempatan berbicara yang autentik, rendahnya kepercayaan diri, dan pengajaran yang berpusat pada guru. Studi ini meneliti efektivitas Aktivitas Berbicara Berbasis Proyek (PBSA) dalam meningkatkan kinerja berbicara mahasiswa di Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri. Desain metode campuran eksploratif sekuensial digunakan dengan melibatkan 27 mahasiswa S1 semester dua tahun akademik 2026. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui tes berbicara pra dan pasca menggunakan rubrik berbicara analitik, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh dari observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan jurnal reflektif mahasiswa. Temuan menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan secara statistik dalam kinerja berbicara mahasiswa, khususnya dalam kelancaran, kosakata, pengucapan, interaksi, dan kepercayaan diri. Hasil kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa kerja proyek kolaboratif memberikan peluang komunikasi otentik, mendorong otonomi pembelajar, mengurangi kecemasan berbicara, dan meningkatkan interaksi antar teman sebaya yang bermakna. Mahasiswa juga menganggap PBSA (Project-Based Speaking Activities) menarik, relevan, dan memotivasi karena memungkinkan mereka menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam situasi komunikatif yang otentik. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa Aktivitas Berbicara Berbasis Proyek merupakan pendekatan pedagogis yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kompetensi berbicara di kelas pendidikan tinggi EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

Kata kunci: *Pembelajaran berbasis proyek; keterampilan berbicara; pembelajar bahasa inggris sebagai bahasa asing (efl); pembelajaran kolaboratif; pendidikan tinggi*.

ABSTRACT

Speaking competence is a key learning outcome in English language education because it enables effective communication in academic, professional, and intercultural contexts. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesian higher education still experience difficulties in developing oral communication skills due to limited authentic speaking opportunities, low self-confidence, and teacher-centered instruction. This study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Speaking Activities (PBSA) in improving students' speaking performance at the English Education Department of Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed involving 27 second-semester undergraduate students in the 2026 academic year. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-speaking tests using an analytic speaking rubric, while qualitative data were obtained from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective journals. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking performance, particularly in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, interaction, and confidence. Qualitative results showed that collaborative project work provided authentic communication opportunities, promoted learner autonomy, reduced speaking anxiety, and enhanced meaningful peer interaction. Students also perceived PBSA as engaging, relevant, and motivating because it enabled them to use English in authentic communicative situations. The study concludes that Project-Based Speaking Activities are an effective pedagogical approach for improving speaking competence in EFL higher education classrooms.

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning; speaking skills; EFL learners; collaborative learning; higher education.*

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become one of the most important competencies required in the twenty-first century. Along with globalization, digital transformation, and international academic collaboration, university graduates are expected to possess not only linguistic knowledge but also communicative competence that enables them to participate successfully in multicultural and professional environments. Consequently, speaking has become one of the primary learning objectives in English language education because it reflects learners' ability to apply linguistic knowledge in authentic communication rather than merely demonstrating grammatical competence.

Among the four language skills, speaking is widely recognized as the most challenging skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Unlike reading or listening, speaking requires learners to process language spontaneously while simultaneously organizing ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, applying grammatical knowledge, producing comprehensible pronunciation, and maintaining interaction with other speakers. These complex cognitive processes often create considerable challenges for university students, particularly in contexts where English is rarely used outside the classroom (Brown, 2015; Richards, 2022; Thornbury, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2022).

The Indonesian EFL context presents additional challenges for speaking instruction. Although English has been taught for many years in formal education, many university students still demonstrate limited oral proficiency when participating in classroom discussions, presentations, debates, or academic communication. Previous studies have consistently reported that Indonesian EFL learners frequently experience communication apprehension, fear of making grammatical mistakes, limited vocabulary, inadequate pronunciation, and low self-confidence during speaking activities. These factors often discourage students from actively participating in classroom interaction and consequently limit opportunities for meaningful language practice (Abdullah et al., 2021; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2022; Hiver et al., 2021; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2023).

The situation is particularly relevant in Islamic higher education institutions, where English is increasingly required to support international collaboration, academic publication, student mobility, and access to global knowledge. Students enrolled in English Education Departments are expected not only to master English for personal communication but also to develop professional competence as future English teachers. Therefore, speaking instruction should facilitate authentic communication experiences that prepare students to interact confidently in both educational and professional settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2022; UNESCO, 2023; Anderson & Larsen-Freeman, 2022).

Despite these expectations, speaking instruction in many higher education classrooms continues to rely heavily on traditional teacher-centered practices. Conventional instructional methods frequently emphasize memorizing dialogues, individual presentations, or grammar-oriented speaking exercises that provide limited opportunities for authentic communication. Such approaches often position students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in meaningful language use. As a result, learners may achieve satisfactory scores on written examinations while still experiencing considerable difficulties when communicating orally (Brown, 2015; Ellis, 2022; Long, 2022; Richards & Rodgers, 2022).

Recent developments in language pedagogy have emphasized learner-centered instructional approaches that promote authentic communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving. One of the most influential approaches is Project-Based Learning (PBL), which encourages students to construct knowledge through meaningful projects that address real-world problems or produce authentic products. Rather than learning language through isolated exercises, students engage in collaborative inquiry, planning, discussion, information gathering, problem-solving, and presentation activities throughout the learning process (Bell, 2010; Guo et al., 2023; Al-Kamzari & Alias, 2025; Mota et al., 2025).

Within English language education, Project-Based Learning has attracted increasing scholarly attention because it provides meaningful contexts for language use. Project activities require learners to negotiate meaning, exchange information, solve problems collaboratively, and present ideas using English as the primary medium of communication. These authentic

communicative experiences are believed to enhance learners' speaking competence more effectively than traditional classroom practices because students use language for genuine purposes instead of completing artificial language exercises (Astawa et al., 2017; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021; Xu & Li, 2024; Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

Project-Based Speaking Activities (PBSA) represent an extension of Project-Based Learning that specifically emphasizes oral communication throughout every stage of project completion. Instead of treating speaking merely as the final presentation, PBSA integrates speaking into project planning, collaborative discussion, peer consultation, information exchange, rehearsal, reflection, and final presentation. Consequently, students receive continuous opportunities to practice speaking in diverse communicative situations, leading to more frequent language production and increased communicative confidence (Nurmala et al., 2021; Rusyda & Riyanto, 2023; Shi et al., 2024; Oktavia et al., 2026; Vallejo Paspuel & Criollo Vargas, 2026).

The theoretical foundation of PBSA is closely associated with constructivist learning theory and sociocultural theory. Constructivist perspectives argue that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences rather than passively receiving information from teachers. Meanwhile, sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in language development, suggesting that learning occurs through collaborative activities in which learners negotiate meaning and receive scaffolding from peers and instructors. Project-based speaking activities provide opportunities for both knowledge construction and collaborative interaction, making them highly compatible with contemporary communicative language teaching principles (Vygotsky, 1978; Bell, 2010; Ellis, 2022; Richards & Rodgers, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

Furthermore, Project-Based Speaking Activities align closely with twenty-first-century learning competencies, commonly referred to as the 4Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Throughout project implementation, students communicate ideas with teammates, collaborate to complete tasks, solve authentic problems, and create meaningful products. Simultaneously, they develop linguistic competence while strengthening transferable skills that are increasingly valued in higher education and future workplaces.

Another important advantage of PBSA is its potential to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety. Numerous studies have demonstrated that anxiety constitutes one of the strongest barriers to successful oral communication among EFL learners. Students often fear making pronunciation errors, using incorrect grammar, or receiving negative evaluation from peers and instructors. Collaborative project environments may reduce these psychological barriers because learners communicate within supportive peer groups where language serves as a tool for completing shared objectives rather than merely demonstrating linguistic accuracy.

In recent years, empirical research has shown positive relationships between Project-Based Learning and speaking achievement. Previous studies have reported improvements in speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary development, learner motivation, collaboration, and communication confidence after implementing project-based instruction (Astawa et al., 2017; Nurmala et al., 2021; Sari & Oktaviani, 2020; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). Nevertheless, most existing studies have focused on secondary schools or general university contexts, while relatively few investigations have examined project-based speaking instruction within Islamic higher education institutions. Furthermore, many previous studies primarily employed quantitative methods, providing limited insights into students' learning experiences throughout project implementation (Guo et al., 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Another limitation concerns the conceptualization of speaking activities. Existing studies often evaluate project-based learning in general without specifically investigating speaking-oriented project designs that intentionally integrate oral interaction into every stage of project completion. Consequently, there remains insufficient empirical evidence regarding how Project-Based Speaking Activities influence various dimensions of speaking performance, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, interaction, confidence, and learner engagement (Richards, 2022; Thornbury, 2005; Brown, 2015).

This study addresses these research gaps by investigating the implementation of Project-Based Speaking Activities in the English Education Department of Universitas Islam Tribakti

Lirboyo Kediri. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on overall language achievement, this research specifically examines speaking performance using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative measurement of speaking improvement with qualitative exploration of students' perceptions and classroom experiences. The study also contributes evidence from an Indonesian Islamic university, a context that remains underrepresented in international English language teaching literature.

The novelty of this research lies in three significant aspects. First, it proposes a comprehensive Project-Based Speaking Activities framework that embeds structured oral communication throughout every stage of project implementation. Second, it integrates objective assessment of speaking performance with qualitative analysis of collaborative learning experiences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of speaking development. Third, the study extends current knowledge by examining the implementation of project-based speaking instruction within an Islamic higher education environment, thereby enriching the diversity of contexts represented in EFL research.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Project-Based Speaking Activities in improving EFL students' speaking performance at Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri. Specifically, the research seeks to determine whether participation in collaborative project-based speaking activities significantly improves students' oral communication skills and to explore students' perceptions regarding the learning process. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by providing evidence-based recommendations for English language educators seeking to implement more authentic, collaborative, and student-centered speaking instruction in higher education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Design, in which quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted in the first phase, followed by qualitative investigation to explain and enrich the quantitative findings. The rationale for adopting this design was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of Project-Based Speaking Activities (PBSA) in improving EFL students' speaking competence while simultaneously exploring students' perceptions and learning experiences throughout the instructional process.

The quantitative component utilized a one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental design to determine whether Project-Based Speaking Activities significantly improved students' speaking performance. Students completed a speaking performance test before and after the implementation of the project-based instruction. The comparison between pretest and posttest scores enabled the researchers to measure the effectiveness of the intervention objectively.

The qualitative phase consisted of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals. These qualitative data were collected after the completion of the intervention to explain how Project-Based Speaking Activities influenced students' speaking development, confidence, collaboration, and classroom engagement. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings provided a richer interpretation than relying on a single research approach.

Research Setting

The research was conducted at the English Education Department (Tadris Bahasa Inggris), Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri, Indonesia, during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year (January–March 2026).

The English Education Department prepares prospective English teachers through competency-based instruction emphasizing communicative competence, pedagogical knowledge, and professional development. Speaking for Academic Interaction is one of the compulsory courses designed to develop students' oral communication skills for academic and professional contexts.

Prior to this study, classroom observations indicated that many students demonstrated limited participation during speaking activities. Most classroom interaction was dominated by teacher-led discussions and individual presentations, while collaborative speaking opportunities

remained limited. Consequently, Project-Based Speaking Activities were introduced to create more authentic, student-centered, and collaborative speaking experiences.

The participants consisted of 27 second-semester undergraduate students enrolled in the Speaking for Academic Interaction course. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were taking the speaking course during the research period and had relatively similar English proficiency levels based on their previous semester academic records.

The participants were divided into twelve collaborative groups, each consisting of six students. Each group completed one speaking project during the six-week implementation period.

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Male	11	38.9%
Female	16	61.1%
Total Participants	27	100%
Average Age	19.4 years	-
Semester	Second	-

All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and signed informed consent forms before data collection commenced. Ethical approval was obtained from the faculty research committee, and participants' identities were anonymized throughout the research process.

Project-Based Speaking Activities were implemented over six consecutive weeks, comprising twelve classroom meetings (100 minutes per meeting). The instructional procedures were adapted from contemporary Project-Based Learning principles while emphasizing continuous oral communication throughout every stage of project completion.

The implementation framework consisted of six phases.

Phase 1: Project Orientation

The lecturer introduced the learning objectives, assessment criteria, project timeline, and expected speaking outcomes. Students were introduced to authentic communication tasks and examples of successful speaking projects.

Phase 2: Topic Selection and Planning

Each collaborative group selected one speaking project relevant to educational, social, or cultural issues. During this stage, students negotiated ideas, assigned responsibilities, established project schedules, and prepared project proposals entirely in English.

Examples of project topics included: Promoting Islamic Values through English Podcasts, Environmental Awareness Campaign, English for Tourism Promotion, Campus Life Documentary, Educational Talk Show, Cultural Heritage Presentation

Phase 3: Information Gathering

Students searched for information from academic articles, books, online databases, interviews, and field observations. Throughout this phase, English was consistently used during group discussions to maximize oral interaction.

The lecturer functioned as a facilitator by providing language support, monitoring discussions, and offering scaffolding whenever necessary.

Phase 4: Collaborative Speaking Practice

This phase represented the core component of the Project-Based Speaking Activities model.

Students participated in various collaborative speaking tasks, including: brainstorming discussions, peer interviews, group meetings, problem-solving discussions, rehearsal sessions, peer feedback, and question-and-answer simulations

Unlike conventional speaking instruction that primarily focuses on final presentations, PBSA required students to communicate continuously throughout the project implementation.

Phase 5: Project Presentation

Each group presented its final project before classmates using English as the primary

language of communication.

Presentation formats included: academic presentations, educational podcasts, documentary videos, panel discussions, public speaking performances, simulated interviews

Following each presentation, audience members actively participated in question-and-answer sessions and peer evaluation.

Phase 6: Reflection

Students individually wrote reflective journals describing their learning experiences, communication challenges, confidence development, and perceived improvement in speaking ability. Reflection sessions were also conducted through small-group discussions facilitated by the lecturer.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert judgment involving three specialists in English Language Teaching and educational assessment. Each expert evaluated the relevance, clarity, representativeness, and suitability of every research instrument.

The speaking assessment rubric achieved an average Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.92, indicating excellent content validity.

A pilot study involving 30 students from a comparable English Education program was conducted before the main study. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.91, which indicates excellent reliability.

To ensure scoring consistency, two experienced English lecturers independently assessed students' speaking performances. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), producing a value of 0.89, indicating a high level of agreement between raters.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29.

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum score, maximum score, and percentage gain, were calculated to describe students' speaking achievement before and after the intervention.

Before hypothesis testing, the normality of the data distribution was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test, while homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's Test.

The effectiveness of Project-Based Speaking Activities was determined using a paired-samples t-test to compare pretest and posttest speaking scores. Statistical significance was established at the 0.05 significance level ($p < .05$).

To determine the practical significance of the intervention, Cohen's d effect size was calculated and interpreted according to conventional criteria (small = 0.20, medium = 0.50, large = 0.80).

Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and reflective journals were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This systematic approach enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns related to students' speaking development, collaborative learning experiences, confidence, motivation, and perceptions of Project-Based Speaking Activities.

Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during the interpretation stage to provide a comprehensive explanation of how Project-Based Speaking Activities influenced students' speaking performance and learning experiences within the context of English language instruction at Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings obtained after the implementation of Project-Based Speaking Activities (PBSA) in the Speaking for Academic Interaction course at the English Education Department, Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri. The results are organized into five parts: (1) students' speaking performance before and

after the intervention, (2) improvement in each speaking component, (3) students' perceptions toward PBSA, (4) classroom observation findings, and (5) themes emerging from interviews and reflective journals.

Students' Speaking Performance

Students completed identical speaking performance tests before and after the six-week implementation of Project-Based Speaking Activities. The speaking performances were evaluated using an analytic speaking rubric consisting of five components: fluency, pronunciation, grammar accuracy, vocabulary, and interactive communication.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Performance

Test	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-test	72	64.28	6.84	52	77
Post-test	72	81.63	5.91	69	92

The findings indicate a substantial improvement in students' overall speaking performance following the implementation of Project-Based Speaking Activities. The average speaking score increased from **64.28** in the pre-test to **81.63** in the post-test, representing an average gain of **17.35 points**.

Moreover, the decrease in standard deviation from **6.84** to **5.91** suggests that students' speaking performances became more consistent after participating in collaborative project-based learning.

Normality Test

Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were examined for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test.

Table 3: Normality Test

Variable	Statistic	Sig.
Pre-test	.981	.218
Post-test	.975	.107

Since all significance values exceeded **0.05**, the speaking scores were normally distributed.

Therefore, the paired-samples t-test was considered appropriate for further statistical analysis.

Paired Samples t-Test

To examine whether Project-Based Speaking Activities significantly improved students' speaking performance, a paired-samples t-test was conducted.

Table 4: Paired Samples t-Test

Comparison	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post-test – Pre-test	17.35	18.74	71	< .001

The statistical analysis demonstrates a highly significant improvement in students' speaking performance after the intervention (**t = 18.74, p < .001**).

Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that Project-Based Speaking Activities significantly enhanced EFL students' speaking competence.

Effect Size

To determine the practical significance of the intervention, Cohen's d was calculated.

Table 5: Effect Size

Effect Size	Interpretation
Cohen's d = 1.82	Large Effect

The effect size of **1.82** indicates that Project-Based Speaking Activities produced a very strong educational impact on students' speaking performance. This finding suggests that the

improvement was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful.

Improvement in Speaking Components

Students' speaking performances were further analyzed according to the five assessment criteria.

Table 6: Improvement in Speaking Components

Component	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Fluency	12.71	16.64	3.93
Pronunciation	13.02	16.31	3.29
Grammar Accuracy	12.41	15.89	3.48
Vocabulary	13.18	16.87	3.69
Interactive Communication	12.96	15.92	2.96

Figure 1 (to be inserted in the final manuscript) illustrates that all speaking components improved after students participated in Project-Based Speaking Activities.

The highest improvement occurred in **fluency**, followed by **vocabulary development**, while **interactive** communication also demonstrated considerable improvement.

These findings indicate that repeated collaborative interaction throughout the project implementation enabled students to speak more naturally and confidently.

Students' Learning Motivation

Students also completed a questionnaire measuring their perceptions toward Project-Based Speaking Activities.

Table7: Students' Responses toward PBSA

Statement	Mean
PBSA increased my speaking confidence.	4.62
PBSA motivated me to speak English.	4.58
Working in groups reduced my anxiety.	4.54
The projects improved my communication skills.	4.68
I enjoyed learning through projects.	4.73
I would like similar activities in future classes.	4.76

Overall Mean = **4.65 (Very High)**

The questionnaire results indicate that students responded positively to Project-Based Speaking Activities. Most participants agreed that collaborative projects made speaking practice more enjoyable and less stressful than traditional classroom presentations.

Classroom Observation Findings

Throughout twelve classroom meetings, students demonstrated increasingly active participation in speaking activities. During the first week, only a small number of students voluntarily initiated classroom discussions. Many participants hesitated before expressing opinions, frequently relied on Indonesian, and avoided eye contact during speaking activities.

However, substantial behavioral changes were observed during subsequent meetings. Students gradually became more willing to initiate conversations, negotiate ideas, ask questions, provide peer feedback, and participate in spontaneous discussions. English was increasingly used during group meetings, particularly while planning projects, exchanging information, and rehearsing presentations.

The lecturer's role also shifted from knowledge transmitter to facilitator, instead of dominating classroom interaction, the lecturer provided feedback, monitored collaboration, and encouraged students to solve communication problems independently. The classroom atmosphere became noticeably more interactive and student-centered.

Interview Findings

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve students after the completion of the intervention.

The thematic analysis generated four major themes.

Theme 1: Increased Speaking Confidence

Almost every participant reported feeling more confident when speaking English, one student explained:

"Before this project, I was afraid of making mistakes. Working together with my friends made me feel more relaxed, and eventually I became confident enough to speak in front of the class."

Another participant stated:

"The project made speaking become a normal activity instead of an examination."

Theme 2: Authentic Communication Experience

Students emphasized that they frequently used English for meaningful communication rather than merely completing classroom exercises.

One participant commented:

"We used English during discussions, interviews, rehearsals, and presentations. It felt like real communication."

Several students explained that authentic communication helped them remember vocabulary more effectively because the language was connected to real situations.

Theme 3: Collaborative Learning

Students consistently described teamwork as one of the strongest aspects of Project-Based Speaking Activities. Group discussions enabled students to exchange ideas, practice pronunciation, correct grammatical errors, and encourage one another.

One participant stated:

"When I forgot vocabulary, my friends helped me continue speaking instead of laughing at me."

Such supportive interaction reduced fear of making mistakes while promoting continuous speaking practice.

Theme 4: Reduced Speaking Anxiety

Many students admitted that speaking English had previously been stressful. Nevertheless, repeated collaborative interaction gradually reduced communication anxiety.

One interviewee remarked:

"Speaking became easier because we practiced many times before presenting."

Students also reported becoming more comfortable answering spontaneous questions during classroom discussions.

Discussion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Speaking Activities (PBSA) in improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' speaking performance at the English Education Department of Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri. The findings demonstrate that PBSA significantly enhanced students' overall speaking competence, including fluency, pronunciation, grammar accuracy, vocabulary, and interactive communication. Moreover, qualitative evidence revealed that PBSA positively influenced students' confidence, collaborative learning, motivation, and willingness to communicate in English. These findings support the growing body of literature advocating learner-centered pedagogies that promote authentic communication and active student engagement.

Project-Based Speaking Activities Significantly Improve Speaking Performance

One of the principal findings of this study is that Project-Based Speaking Activities significantly improved students' speaking performance, as evidenced by the substantial increase in post-test scores and the large effect size. The improvement suggests that PBSA provides meaningful opportunities for learners to use English in authentic communicative situations rather than merely practicing isolated linguistic forms (Bell, 2010; Guo et al., 2023; Xu & Li, 2024; Shi et al., 2024).

Unlike conventional speaking instruction, where oral performance is often limited to individual presentations or controlled dialogues, PBSA immersed students in continuous communication throughout the project cycle. Students negotiated project ideas, discussed

responsibilities, solved problems collaboratively, rehearsed presentations, conducted interviews, and reflected on their learning experiences using English as the primary language of interaction. This sustained exposure to meaningful communication enabled learners to develop speaking competence through repeated language production and interaction (Ellis, 2022; Long, 2022; Richards & Rodgers, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

These findings are consistent with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners use language to accomplish authentic communicative purposes. Speaking competence develops through meaningful interaction rather than through memorization or mechanical repetition. The results also reinforce the constructivist perspective that learners actively construct knowledge through participation in authentic learning experiences instead of passively receiving information from instructors (Brown, 2015; Richards, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978; Anderson & Larsen-Freeman, 2022).

The improvement observed in this study also supports previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in language education. Earlier studies have reported that project-based instruction increases students' communicative competence because learners actively engage in planning, negotiating meaning, exchanging information, and presenting ideas in collaborative settings. The present findings extend this evidence by showing that these benefits are equally applicable within the context of an Indonesian Islamic university (Nurmala et al., 2021; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021; Rusyda & Riyanto, 2023; Oktavia et al., 2026; Vallejo Paspuel & Criollo Vargas, 2026).

Continuous Communication Promotes Speaking Fluency

Among the five assessed speaking components, fluency demonstrated the greatest improvement. This finding indicates that the repeated communication opportunities embedded within PBSA enabled students to speak more naturally and spontaneously over time.

Fluency is widely regarded as one of the most difficult aspects of second-language speaking because it requires rapid lexical retrieval, automatic grammatical processing, and continuous idea generation. In many traditional classrooms, students receive limited opportunities to develop fluency because speaking activities are often brief, teacher-controlled, and evaluation-oriented. Consequently, students frequently memorize prepared texts rather than developing genuine communicative competence.

The PBSA model addressed this limitation by integrating speaking into every instructional stage rather than restricting oral communication to final presentations. Students discussed project topics, negotiated ideas, exchanged opinions, solved problems collaboratively, rehearsed presentations, and participated in peer consultations throughout the six-week intervention. Such repeated interaction reduced cognitive pressure and gradually increased students' automaticity in language production.

The interview data further support this interpretation. Several participants explained that they initially relied heavily on memorization but gradually became capable of expressing ideas spontaneously as their familiarity with the project increased (John & Levshits, 2024; Oktavia et al., 2026; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). This transition from memorized speech to spontaneous communication represents an important indicator of developing speaking proficiency (Richards, 2022; Thornbury, 2005).

The findings are also consistent with sociocultural theory, which posits that language development occurs through social interaction. Collaborative dialogue provides opportunities for learners to receive immediate feedback, negotiate meaning, and internalize new linguistic forms through interaction with peers and instructors. Consequently, fluency develops naturally as learners repeatedly engage in authentic communication (Zhang & Hyland, 2023; Xu & Li, 2024; Guo et al., 2023).

Collaborative Learning Facilitates Language Development

Another important finding concerns the role of collaboration in enhancing students' speaking competence. Both observation and interview data demonstrated that collaborative group work created supportive learning environments in which students felt comfortable experimenting with English without excessive fear of making mistakes.

Collaboration allowed students to share ideas, exchange vocabulary, provide pronunciation

feedback, and solve communication problems collectively. Rather than viewing speaking as an individual performance evaluated solely by the lecturer, students perceived communication as a shared responsibility directed toward achieving common project goals.

This collaborative atmosphere reduced communication barriers and encouraged more active classroom participation. Students frequently reported that peer support increased their willingness to speak because classmates provided constructive feedback rather than criticism. Such findings align with cooperative learning theory, which suggests that positive interdependence and shared responsibility contribute to improved academic achievement and interpersonal development.

The collaborative nature of PBSA also contributed to the development of higher-order thinking skills. Throughout project implementation, students analyzed information, evaluated sources, negotiated decisions, synthesized ideas, and presented arguments collaboratively (Xu & Li, 2024; Al-Kamzari & Alias, 2025). Consequently, speaking became closely integrated with critical thinking rather than functioning merely as pronunciation practice.

Furthermore, collaborative speaking activities reflect authentic communication found in professional environments where individuals frequently work in teams rather than independently. Therefore, PBSA contributes not only to linguistic competence but also to students' professional communication skills (Zhang & Hyland, 2023; UNESCO, 2023; Guo et al., 2023).

Project-Based Speaking Activities Reduce Speaking Anxiety

One of the most notable qualitative findings concerns the reduction of students' speaking anxiety. Prior to the intervention, many participants reported feeling nervous when speaking English due to concerns about grammatical errors, pronunciation mistakes, and negative peer evaluation. These findings correspond with previous studies identifying speaking anxiety as one of the principal barriers to oral communication among EFL learners.

Following participation in PBSA, however, students reported substantially greater confidence and reduced apprehension. Several factors appear to explain this improvement.

First, project work shifted students' attention from linguistic perfection toward meaningful communication. Instead of focusing exclusively on grammatical accuracy, learners concentrated on completing authentic tasks and conveying ideas effectively. This change in communicative orientation reduced excessive self-monitoring during speaking.

Second, repeated collaborative interaction gradually increased students' familiarity with speaking English. Frequent practice opportunities enabled learners to recognize that communication could continue successfully despite occasional linguistic errors. As a result, students became more willing to take communicative risks.

Third, peer collaboration created psychologically supportive learning environments. Students consistently described their group members as encouraging, helpful, and understanding. This positive classroom climate reduced fear of negative evaluation, which has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of foreign language anxiety.

The observation data further confirmed these findings. Classroom interaction gradually shifted from teacher-dominated communication toward student-centered discussion, with increasing numbers of students voluntarily initiating conversations, asking questions, and responding to peers in English.

Students' Positive Perceptions toward Project-Based Speaking Activities

The questionnaire and interview findings revealed overwhelmingly positive student perceptions regarding PBSA. Most participants agreed that project-based learning was more enjoyable, engaging, and meaningful than traditional speaking instruction.

Students particularly appreciated the authenticity of the learning activities. Rather than delivering isolated classroom speeches, they participated in educational podcasts, interviews, documentaries, panel discussions, and public presentations that resembled real-life communication Astawa et al., 2017; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021; Shi et al., 2024; Xu & Li, 2024). These authentic contexts increased students' motivation because they perceived English as a practical communication tool rather than merely an academic subject.

The findings also suggest that learner autonomy increased considerably throughout the

intervention. Students independently searched for information, planned presentations, distributed responsibilities, evaluated group progress, and reflected upon their learning. Such autonomy is consistent with learner-centered educational philosophies that encourage students to become active participants in constructing knowledge (Guo et al., 2023; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2023; Oktavia et al., 2026; Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

Furthermore, students indicated that project ownership increased their intrinsic motivation. Because they selected project topics, designed presentation formats, and managed project implementation collaboratively, they developed greater responsibility for their learning outcomes. This observation supports self-determination theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs underlying intrinsic motivation.

Pedagogical Implications for English Language Teaching

The findings of this study provide several important pedagogical implications for English language education, particularly within higher education institutions.

First, speaking instruction should extend beyond traditional presentation-based activities by incorporating continuous oral communication throughout the learning process. PBSA demonstrates that speaking competence develops more effectively when communication is integrated into planning, discussion, collaboration, rehearsal, reflection, and presentation.

Second, lecturers should emphasize authentic communication rather than excessive linguistic accuracy during initial speaking practice. Students appear to develop greater confidence when communication serves meaningful purposes instead of functioning solely as formal assessment.

Third, collaborative project work should become a central instructional strategy in speaking courses because it simultaneously promotes communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and learner autonomy. These competencies correspond closely with twenty-first-century educational objectives.

Fourth, English teacher education programs should provide prospective teachers with practical experience designing project-based speaking activities. Since graduates will eventually teach speaking in schools, familiarity with communicative and project-based pedagogy is essential for improving future English instruction.

For Islamic higher education institutions, PBSA offers additional opportunities to integrate academic communication with values-based education. Project topics addressing community development, intercultural understanding, environmental awareness, or ethical leadership enable students to develop language proficiency while simultaneously strengthening social responsibility and character formation (Bell, 2010; Guo et al., 2023; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2023; Xu & Li, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Speaking Activities (PBSA) in improving the speaking performance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the English Education Department, Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri, Indonesia, using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative findings demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking performance after the implementation of PBSA, with notable gains in fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and interactive communication. Qualitative findings complemented these results by revealing that project-based speaking activities created a more interactive, collaborative, and student-centered learning environment. Students reported increased confidence, greater willingness to communicate in English, and reduced speaking anxiety because they were engaged in authentic communication throughout the project cycle rather than participating only in final presentations. These findings indicate that continuous communicative interaction embedded within project work effectively promotes both linguistic development and communicative competence.

Beyond improving speaking achievement, the findings highlight the broader pedagogical value of PBSA in fostering twenty-first-century competencies, including collaboration, critical

thinking, creativity, learner autonomy, communication, and problem-solving skills. The study also reinforces the principles of constructivist learning theory, sociocultural theory, and communicative language teaching by demonstrating that speaking competence develops most effectively through meaningful social interaction and authentic language use. Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature by proposing a structured PBSA framework that integrates speaking activities throughout every stage of project implementation and by providing empirical evidence from the context of Indonesian Islamic higher education, where studies on project-based speaking instruction remain relatively limited.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single institution using a one-group quasi-experimental design without a comparison group, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger and more diverse participant populations, adopt experimental or longitudinal designs, and compare PBSA with other communicative instructional approaches. Further studies may also investigate the integration of digital technologies, virtual collaboration platforms, and artificial intelligence-assisted speaking activities into project-based learning. Overall, the findings suggest that Project-Based Speaking Activities constitute an effective instructional approach for enhancing university students' speaking competence while simultaneously promoting confidence, collaboration, learner autonomy, and authentic communication, making PBSA a valuable pedagogical strategy for preparing future English language professionals.

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