THE STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL WITH BLENDED LEARNING OF THE EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS OF SMP NEGERI 4 LAHEWA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the English speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa through the implementation of a blended learning model. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this research involved 22 students, with data collected through observation, interviews, and oral tests. The findings indicate that students' speaking skills generally range from a fair to a good level. Quantitative analysis of the oral test results reveals average scores of 2.8 for pronunciation, 2.5 for grammar, 2.4 for vocabulary, 2.3 for fluency, and 3.0 for comprehension. While most students demonstrated a decent understanding of spoken English, significant challenges persist in vocabulary retention, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Students perceive blended learning as engaging and flexible; however, they express a preference for face-to-face interaction due to the opportunity for direct speaking practice. The study concludes that although the blended learning model shows promise, it requires further optimization, particularly in designing interactive online components, to effectively enhance students' productive language skills.
Keywords: *English speaking skills, blended learning, SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa.*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris siswa kelas delapan di SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa melalui implementasi model pembelajaran campuran (blended learning). Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan 22 siswa, dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan tes lisan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan berbicara siswa secara umum berkisar dari tingkat cukup baik hingga baik. Analisis kuantitatif hasil tes lisan menunjukkan skor rata-rata 2,8 untuk pengucapan, 2,5 untuk tata bahasa, 2,4 untuk kosakata, 2,3 untuk kelancaran, dan 3,0 untuk pemahaman. Meskipun sebagian besar siswa menunjukkan pemahaman yang baik tentang bahasa Inggris lisan, tantangan signifikan masih ada dalam retensi kosakata, ketepatan tata bahasa, dan kelancaran. Siswa menganggap pembelajaran campuran menarik dan fleksibel; namun, mereka lebih menyukai interaksi tatap muka karena adanya kesempatan untuk praktik berbicara langsung. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun model pembelajaran campuran menjanjikan, model ini membutuhkan optimasi lebih lanjut, khususnya dalam merancang komponen daring interaktif, untuk secara efektif meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa produktif siswa.
Kata kunci: *Kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris, pembelajaran campuran, SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa.*

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the fundamental pillar for the development of human potential and the advancement of civilization. In the context of the Indonesian nation, the state has a constitutional obligation to ensure that every citizen obtains this right, as explicitly guaranteed in Article 31, Paragraph 1 of the *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945*. As the world moves rapidly into

an era of globalization and massive technological disruption, the educational landscape is undergoing a significant transformation. This shift is particularly evident in the realm of language education, where English has become a global necessity for communication and professional competitiveness. Consequently, the teaching of English must evolve by integrating advanced technology into the learning process to remain relevant. However, despite the constitutional mandate and the demands of the modern era, the reality of education in Indonesia often faces systemic hurdles. These challenges, ranging from curriculum adjustments to the readiness of human resources, create a complex environment where the ideal of technologically integrated education often clashes with the practical limitations found in many schools across the archipelago (Fitria, 2023; Hamilaturroyya & Adibah, 2025).

Despite the noble aspirations to modernize education, the reality on the ground presents a stark contrast, particularly in the mastery of English productive skills. One of the most significant barriers preventing the improvement of education quality is the limitation in infrastructure and facilities, which remains a persistent issue in many regions. Systemic challenges such as unequal access to high-quality learning resources and the lack of supportive technological ecosystems hinder students from achieving proficiency, especially in English speaking skills. Speaking, being an active skill that requires constant practice and confidence, is often neglected due to these constraints. Many students find themselves in classrooms that are ill-equipped to support interactive and communicative language learning, leading to a passive learning environment. This gap between the idealized digital classroom and the resource-constrained reality creates a significant obstacle. Therefore, there is an urgent need to find pedagogical strategies that can navigate these structural limitations while still providing effective avenues for students to practice and improve their oral communication abilities in English (Dewan & Sharma, 2025; Nadia & Amalia, 2025; Peng et al., 2025).

To bridge the gap between traditional constraints and modern demands, educators and researchers have increasingly turned to *blended learning* as a potential solution. This pedagogical approach is considered capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges of limited infrastructure and time by combining the strengths of face-to-face instruction with the flexibility of *online* learning. By integrating these two modes, *blended learning* is expected to create a more dynamic, effective, and engaging educational experience that transcends the four walls of the classroom. Theoretically, this model allows students to access materials and practice listening or reading at their own pace outside of class, while dedicating valuable in-class time to interactive speaking activities. This method shifts the paradigm from a teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered one, fostering autonomy and self-directed learning. It offers a promising middle ground that does not entirely rely on expensive digital infrastructure for every aspect of learning but utilizes available technology to maximize exposure to the target language, thereby potentially boosting speaking competence (Benlaghrissi & Ouahidi, 2024; Noori, 2025).

The practical application of this method is currently being observed at SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa, a junior high school that is attempting to adapt to these modern pedagogical shifts. At this institution, the *blended learning* model has been implemented by merging digital resources with traditional teaching methods to enhance the English learning curriculum. However, the transition has not been seamless, and the implementation process faces considerable obstacles unique to the local context. Students at SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa frequently encounter difficulties in accessing *online* platforms due to the unequal quality of internet connections in the area. Furthermore, there is a distinct digital divide where not all students have access to adequate devices at home. Additionally, teachers are faced with the challenge of adjusting their professional roles; they must transition from being sole sources of knowledge to facilitators

who manage complex *hybrid* learning interactions. These localized hurdles highlight that while the model is promising, its execution requires careful adaptation to the specific environmental and logistical realities of the school (Detyna & Dommett, 2024; Kusrianto et al., 2025; Mulenga & Shilongo, 2024).

Existing academic literature and previous studies indicate a complex duality regarding the impact of *blended learning*. On one hand, research consistently shows that this model can significantly improve access to diverse learning resources and provide much-needed time flexibility for students. It allows learners to review materials repeatedly, which is beneficial for language acquisition. However, scholarly discussions also reveal various barriers that cannot be ignored. These include significant technological facility gaps, a lack of information technology mastery among both students and educators, and inherent challenges in designing a fair assessment system for *hybrid* work. Moreover, there is a consensus that technology cannot fully replace the human element; face-to-face interaction remains crucial for building students' conceptual understanding, social skills, and character values. In the context of speaking skills, direct interaction with peers and teachers in a physical setting provides immediate feedback and non-verbal cues that are often lost in purely *online* environments. Thus, the challenge lies in balancing these two modalities to ensure they complement rather than hinder each other.

The specific problem addressed in this study arises from the urgent need to evaluate how these theoretical models function in a real-world, resource-constrained environment like SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa, particularly for Grade VIII students. While general studies on *blended learning* abound, there is a lack of specific research detailing how this approach directly contributes to the improvement of English speaking skills in regions with infrastructural challenges. Speaking is often the most difficult skill for students to master due to psychological barriers and lack of practice; therefore, understanding whether *blended learning* aids or complicates this specific skill is vital. The gap lies in understanding the nuances of how students navigate intermittent internet access and limited digital literacy to practice speaking. It is essential to determine if the digital portion of the learning actually translates to better oral performance in class, or if it merely adds an administrative burden without pedagogical gain. This study seeks to fill that knowledge void by focusing specifically on the speaking competency of eighth-grade students (Bagheri & Mohamadi, 2021; Hoesny et al., 2024).

Based on these identified conditions and gaps, this research aims to comprehensively describe the contribution of the *blended learning* model to improving students' English speaking skills, specifically focusing on grade VIII students at SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa. This study is not merely an evaluation of a teaching method; it is an investigation into the resilience and adaptability of a modern pedagogical strategy in a specific educational context. By rigorously evaluating both the effectiveness of the model and the challenges faced during its implementation, this research intends to offer valuable insights. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical contributions to the field of English Language Teaching (*ELT*) and practical guidelines for educators in similar settings. Ultimately, the novelty of this research lies in its potential to inform the development of more adaptive, inclusive, and quality English language learning strategies that can thrive even amidst infrastructural limitations in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the implementation of the *blended learning* model and its contribution to the development of students' English speaking skills. The qualitative approach was specifically selected to enable the researcher to explore and understand the phenomenon within its natural context through the collection of rich, holistic, and non-numerical data, rather

than relying on statistical quantification. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa, located in Balefadorotuho Village, Lahewa District, North Nias Regency, North Sumatra Province. The study took place over a period of two months, ranging from August to September 2025. The primary subjects of this research were eighth-grade students, who were directly involved in the instructional process. By focusing on this specific demographic and setting, the study aims to capture authentic educational experiences and interactions that occur during the application of the learning model in a real-world classroom environment.

To ensure the validity and depth of the findings, data sources were categorized into primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from eighth-grade students and English teachers who practiced the *blended learning* model, while secondary data included curriculum documents, learning outcomes, and relevant literature such as books and scientific journals. The data collection techniques employed were multifaceted, involving direct observation of the learning process and student participation, as well as in-depth *semi-structured* interviews to understand the participants' experiences, challenges, and motivations. Furthermore, an oral test was administered to measure students' speaking proficiency, specifically assessing critical linguistic aspects such as *pronunciation*, *grammar*, *vocabulary*, *fluency*, and *comprehension*. To support these methods, documentation in the form of video recordings, photographs, and learning archives was collected as visual and contextual evidence, ensuring a robust triangulation of data during the research process to complement the interviews and observations.

The data analysis technique applied in this study followed the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three simultaneous flows of activity. The first stage, *data reduction*, involved the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting the raw data collected from the field to identify emerging patterns and themes related to speaking skills and the *blended learning* implementation. Subsequently, the *data display* stage was conducted by organizing the compressed information into descriptive narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate a clear understanding of the findings. Finally, the process concluded with *conclusion drawing and verification*, where tentative conclusions were formulated and then tested for their validity through source triangulation involving students, teachers, and documents. This rigorous analysis ensures that the final conclusions are supported by consistent and strong data evidence, providing a reliable and valid answer to the research problem regarding the effectiveness of the instructional model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Research Results

Research Findings This study aimed to describe students' English speaking skills through the implementation of a blended learning model. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and oral tests involving 22 eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa.

1. Observation Results of Learning

    Observations were conducted on four aspects of blended learning implementation: (1) Learning Planning, (2) Face-to-Face Execution, (3) Online Learning, and (4) Closure and Reflection. The observation results indicate that the teacher had prepared lesson plans appropriate for the blended learning approach, with good integration of online and offline media. In the face-to-face sessions, the teacher successfully motivated students and used technology such as an LMS and presentation slides. However, formative assessment during the learning process was not yet optimally implemented. In online learning, the teacher actively used the LMS platform, assigned meaningful

tasks, and facilitated online interaction. Learning reflection was also conducted regularly, although its frequency was still limited.

2. Interview Results with Students

The results of in-depth interviews using ten key questions revealed the dynamics of student perceptions regarding the implementation of the blended learning method. In general, the majority of students responded positively to the flexibility offered by this model, which allows for more flexible access to learning materials. This flexibility has been shown to have a specific impact on improving listening skills, as students can replay learning videos repeatedly until they fully understand the material. However, there were significant differences regarding speaking skills. The online learning environment was deemed inadequate for practicing oral skills due to the limited opportunities for practice. Conversely, face-to-face sessions remained a vital and irreplaceable element. Students reported feeling much more confident and comfortable expressing themselves and speaking verbally when facing instructors and classmates in person, compared to virtual environments, which tended to limit spontaneous expression and confidence in communication.

Conversely, an analysis of barriers and preferences indicated that technical and social challenges remained major obstacles in the online learning component. The most dominant barriers perceived by students included unstable internet connections and the lack of meaningful verbal interaction during online sessions. This limited interaction created a lonely learning environment and discouraged active engagement. As a result, there is a strong tendency among students to prioritize face-to-face learning methods over online ones. They consider direct classroom interaction to be much more lively, dynamic, and effective in facilitating understanding, especially when explaining complex concepts. The physical classroom atmosphere, which allows for direct feedback, makes the learning process more engaging. Therefore, while technology offers convenience, human interaction in face-to-face meetings remains the primary preference for an optimal learning experience.

3. Oral Test Results

The oral test assessed five speaking aspects based on Hughes' rubric: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The students' average scores were as follows:

Table 1. Students, Average Scores

Assessment Aspect	Average Score	Remarks
Pronunciation	2.8	Fair, but still influenced by mother-tongue accent
Grammar	2.5	Frequent errors in tense usage
Vocabulary	2.4	Limited and frequent word repetition
Fluency	2.3	Many pauses and hesitations
Comprehension	3.0	Fairly good at understanding simple instructions

Based on the evaluation data summarized in Table 1, students' speaking competency still requires significant improvement in several areas. Comprehension was the only indicator to achieve a score of 3.0, indicating that students' ability to respond to basic instructions was adequate. Conversely, fluency recorded the lowest score of 2.3, as students often hesitated and paused while speaking. This limitation was exacerbated by low vocabulary mastery, with a

score of 2.4 and grammar, with a score of 2.5. Meanwhile, pronunciation scored 2.8, with the influence of their native accent still quite dominant.

Discussion

The analysis of the implementation of the blended learning model to enhance students' English speaking skills reveals a significant disparity between the development of receptive and productive competencies. Research findings indicate that this model tends to be more effective in facilitating listening skills compared to speaking skills. This is clearly evidenced by oral test data, where the comprehension indicator achieved the highest score of 3.0, suggesting that students are able to respond to simple instructions reasonably well. In contrast, the fluency aspect recorded the lowest score of 2.3, characterized by frequent pauses and hesitations during speech. This gap implies that the flexibility of accessing digital materials, such as repeatable instructional videos, greatly assists students in processing language input, yet remains insufficient in encouraging them to produce language output spontaneously and fluently without intensive direct interaction (Feng & Guo, 2024; Hanifa, 2025).

The dynamics of student perceptions regarding learning methods highlight the crucial role of face-to-face interaction in building psychological confidence during speaking activities. Based on in-depth interviews, the majority of students felt that the online learning environment was inadequate for practicing oral skills due to the lack of practice opportunities and immediate feedback. Students reported feeling awkward and lacking the confidence to express themselves in virtual spaces, which were perceived to limit communication spontaneity. Conversely, direct classroom meetings were considered an irreplaceable element as they provided a more vivid and dynamic atmosphere. The physical presence of teachers and classmates provides external motivational encouragement that makes students feel more comfortable and courageous to speak. These findings affirm that in the context of foreign language learning, technology has not yet fully replaced the human touch required to overcome speaking anxiety (Biju et al., 2024; Rosyada & Wahyuni, 2025).

Technical infrastructural barriers were identified as a primary inhibiting factor that distorts the effectiveness of the online component within this blended learning model. Internet connection instability was a dominant complaint that directly affected the quality of verbal interaction during online sessions. Signal disruptions not only hindered the flow of communication but also created a learning environment that felt quiet and isolated, thereby decreasing student motivation for active participation. In learning speaking skills, latency or voice delays caused by poor networks significantly disrupt the rhythm of conversation, ultimately contributing to students' low fluency scores. These technical limitations resulted in the online portion of learning being largely a one-way delivery, where students became passive content consumers rather than active language producers. Consequently, the integration of technology, which was intended to enrich the learning experience, instead became a boomerang that limited students' room for real-time conversational practice.

A thorough evaluation of linguistic components shows that mastery of grammar and vocabulary remains a significant weakness for students, with scores of 2.5 and 2.4, respectively. The low scores in these fundamental aspects correlate directly with the students' inability to speak fluently. Repeated errors in tenses and monotone word repetition indicate that students did not receive adequate constructive corrective feedback during their independent study at home. Furthermore, the pronunciation aspect, which obtained a score of 2.8, is still heavily influenced by the students' mother tongue. This suggests that although students are frequently exposed to English audio-visual materials through the Learning Management System (LMS), they lack supervised drilling or imitation practice, causing pronunciation errors to persist

without significant correction from the instructor (Almusharraf, 2024; Jahara & Abdelrady, 2021; Phany & Dara, 2024).

From a pedagogical perspective, observations of learning planning and implementation show that teachers have successfully developed sound lesson plans with varied media integration. However, there is a gap in the implementation of formative assessment, which remains suboptimal, particularly in providing immediate feedback on students' oral performance. Although teachers actively use LMS platforms and provide meaningful assignments, the frequency of learning reflection remains limited. In the development of speaking skills, regular reflection and evaluation are essential for students to recognize areas needing improvement. The absence of a rapid and personal feedback mechanism in online sessions prevents students from immediately realizing their grammatical or lexical errors, causing these mistakes to crystallize and manifest in the final oral test results, which show stagnation in language accuracy (Hanifa, 2025; Kaharuddin et al., 2024).

The implications of this research demand a reorientation of activity design for future blended learning implementation in English language teaching. Teachers need to design online activities that are more interactive and demand oral output, such as video-based group discussions, voice-recorded conversations, or short audio presentations uploaded to the LMS. Technology must be utilized not merely as a material repository but as a tool to facilitate structured speaking practice. Furthermore, the portion of face-to-face meetings should be optimized for communicative activities and direct motivation, rather than just theoretical delivery. The use of digital platforms that allow for asynchronous interaction, such as voice threads, can serve as an alternative solution to overcome internet connection issues that hinder synchronous interaction, ensuring students still have opportunities to practice speaking without intense time pressure.

This study possesses several limitations that must be acknowledged as context for interpreting the overall findings. The limited sample size, consisting of 22 students at SMP Negeri 4 Lahewa, means the results cannot be widely generalized to student populations in other regions with different demographic and infrastructural characteristics. Additionally, the oral test instrument used may not have fully captured the students' spontaneous communication competence in real-world situations outside the academic classroom context. The blended learning design implemented in this study also appears not to have been specifically optimized to focus on speaking skills, remaining somewhat general in nature. Therefore, further research is suggested to explore specific strategies that can balance the effectiveness of receptive and productive learning in a blended learning environment that is more adaptive to local technological constraints.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the implementation of the blended learning model in English language learning reveals a significant gap between the development of students' receptive and productive competencies. This model is proven to be more effective in facilitating listening skills due to the flexibility of access to digital materials, but less optimal in fostering spontaneous speaking fluency. Technical infrastructure constraints, such as unstable internet connections, are identified as a major inhibiting factor that distorts the quality of online verbal interactions, often turning students into passive content consumers rather than active language producers. In addition to technical barriers, psychological factors play a crucial role, with students feeling that the virtual environment limits spontaneous communication and lacks confidence compared to more dynamic face-to-face encounters. Consequently, the integration of technology has not fully replaced the human touch needed to overcome speaking anxiety,

resulting in students' grammar and vocabulary mastery remaining stagnant without intensive and direct corrective feedback from instructors throughout the online learning process.

The pedagogical evaluation highlights that a fundamental weakness in the implementation of this model lies in the lack of immediate formative feedback mechanisms on students' oral performance, particularly on language accuracy. This leads to the repetition of grammatical errors, which crystallize in final exam results. In response, the implications of this research call for a radical reorientation in the design of learning activities, where technology should be utilized as a tool for facilitating structured speaking practice, such as asynchronous video discussions or audio recordings, rather than simply as a repository of static materials. Face-to-face meetings should be fully optimized for interactive communicative activities to build motivation, while asynchronous solutions can be used to overcome network constraints. Although this study is limited to a small sample, its findings provide a vital foundation for the development of more adaptive blended learning strategies in the future, aiming to balance the effectiveness of receptive and productive learning and ensure that technology serves as a catalyst for real communication competencies that overcome both technical and psychological barriers for students.

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