

Encouraging Students' Motivation in Speaking English Through English Zone

Mahmudya Trivella Muharani^{1*}, Ikhsanudin², Wardah³

^{1,2,3}Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Tanjungpura,
Jl. Pof. Rr. H. Hadari Nawawi, Pontianak
mahmudya@student.untan.ac.id

Abstract

The classroom action research aimed to investigate how the implementation of the English Zone (EZO) could enhance students' motivation to speak English at SMPN 1 Sekayam. The research involved 36 students of Grade VII and was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected using observation checklists and field notes to capture students' motivated behavior during the English-speaking activities. The findings revealed that students' motivation tend to improve from Cycle I to Cycle II. Initially, only a few students demonstrated active engagement in speaking English. However, after refining the classroom strategy—such as shifting from pair to group work, adding symbolic rewards, and using more engaging media—students showed marked improvement. By the end of Cycle II, most students voluntarily spoke English, showed increased confidence, participated actively, and responded positively to feedback. These results emphasize that the supportive and engaging English Zone class setting can effectively increase learners' motivation to speak English in SMPN 1 Sekayam.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research, English Zone, Speaking Motivation

Abstrak

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana penerapan *English Zone* (EZO) dapat meningkatkan motivasi siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris di SMPN 1 Sekayam. Penelitian ini melibatkan 36 siswa kelas VII dan dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus, yang masing-masing terdiri dari tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan, pengamatan, dan refleksi. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan lembar observasi dan catatan lapangan untuk merekam perilaku siswa yang menunjukkan motivasi selama kegiatan berbicara bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa motivasi siswa cenderung meningkat dari Siklus I ke Siklus II. Pada awalnya, hanya sedikit siswa yang menunjukkan keterlibatan aktif dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris. Namun, setelah strategi pembelajaran disempurnakan—seperti beralih dari kerja berpasangan ke kerja kelompok, menambahkan penghargaan simbolis, dan menggunakan media yang lebih menarik—siswa menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan. Pada akhir Siklus II, sebagian besar siswa berbicara bahasa Inggris secara sukarela, menunjukkan peningkatan kepercayaan diri, berpartisipasi aktif, dan merespons umpan balik secara positif. Hasil ini menegaskan bahwa pengaturan kelas *English Zone* yang suportif dan menarik dapat secara efektif meningkatkan motivasi siswa untuk berbicara bahasa Inggris di SMPN 1 Sekayam.

Kata kunci: Penelitian Tindakan Kelas, *English Zone*, Motivasi Berbicara

Copyright (c) 2026 Mahmudya Trivella Muharani, Ikhsanudin, Wardah

✉ Corresponding author: Mahmudya Trivella Muharani

Email Address: mahmudya@student.untan.ac.id (Jl. Pof. Rr. H. Hadari Nawawi, Pontianak)

Received 20 Agustus 2026, Accepted 02 September 2026, Published 11 September 2026

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is considered one of the most essential language skills in English learning because it reflects learners' ability to communicate ideas effectively in real-life situations. Through speaking, learners demonstrate their pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, fluency, and intonation. Rao (2019) stated that among the four primary language skills, speaking is regarded as the most important skill in learning a foreign or second language because learners are often judged based on their speaking performance in real-life communication. This indicates that speaking ability becomes one of the primary indicators of successful language learning.

However, improving speaking skills remains challenging for many students. One of the major factors influencing students' speaking performance is motivation. Zuman and Fujiono (2021) explained that lack of self-motivation significantly affects students' achievement in improving English-speaking skills. Students with low motivation tend to avoid speaking activities, feel anxious when expressing ideas in English, and show limited participation during classroom interaction. This issue was also found among seventh-grade students of Class D at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam, a junior high school located in the border area between Indonesia and Malaysia. Based on preliminary observation conducted by the researcher, many students experienced difficulties in developing their speaking skills. They often struggled with pronunciation, lacked confidence, and had limited opportunities to practice speaking English in meaningful communication. As a result, students became less interested in learning English and tended to avoid using English during classroom activities.

To overcome this issue, the English teacher had attempted several strategies, including encouraging students to use English during lessons. However, the implementation was not effective because students remained passive and reluctant to speak. The absence of clear regulations and consequences for not using English contributed to the failure of the strategy. Therefore, an alternative learning strategy was needed to create a more supportive environment that could encourage students to actively speak English. One potential strategy is the implementation of an English Zone (EZO). An English Zone refers to a designated learning environment where students are encouraged to communicate using English consistently through structured activities, learning media, and agreed classroom rules. Septiyana et al. (2020) found that English Zone implementation encouraged students' active participation in speaking activities and improved their confidence. Similarly, Setyowati (2019) reported that students had positive perceptions toward English Zone implementation because it increased their interest in improving speaking skills.

In addition, motivation plays an important role in determining students' speaking success. Dörnyei (2020) explained that motivation is a dynamic process that initiates, directs, and sustains goal-oriented behavior. In speaking classrooms, motivated students tend to participate actively, demonstrate persistence, and show willingness to communicate. Ryan and Deci (2019) further categorized motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, both of which influence students' engagement in language learning activities.

Unlike previous studies that mainly applied descriptive research methods and different instructional approaches, this study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) by integrating English Zone activities with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This study focused specifically on responsive speaking among seventh-grade students of Class D at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam. Based on the problems identified above, the objective of this study was to investigate how the implementation of English Zone could encourage students' motivation to speak English at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam.

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to investigate how the implementation of English Zone could encourage students' motivation to speak English. According to Burns (2010), action research is a reflective process conducted by teachers to improve classroom practices. Similarly, Creswell (2012) stated that action research aims to solve practical problems in educational settings. This study adopted the action research model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which consists of four cyclical stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

In the planning stage, the researcher identified students' problems related to low motivation in speaking English and designed an action plan through the implementation of English Zone activities. The researcher prepared lesson plans, classroom rules, speaking materials, media, and observation instruments. The learning activities were designed using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to support students' active participation in responsive speaking activities.

During the action stage, the researcher implemented the English Zone in the classroom. Students were encouraged to communicate using English during classroom activities through pair work, group discussions, role-play activities, and responsive speaking practices. The implementation also involved classroom regulations, rewards, and consequences to encourage students to consistently use English during learning activities.

In the observation stage, the researcher observed students' behaviors and participation during the implementation of the English Zone. The observation focused on students' motivation indicators, such as active participation, willingness to communicate, confidence, persistence, and enthusiasm in speaking English. Data were collected simultaneously during classroom activities.

In the reflection stage, the researcher evaluated the implementation results by identifying strengths and weaknesses of the action. The findings from the observation were used to determine whether the implemented strategy successfully improved students' motivation. If the expected outcomes were not achieved, revisions were made for the next cycle.

The participants of this study were 30 seventh-grade students of Class D at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because they demonstrated speaking motivation problems identified during preliminary observation. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to select participants who were considered relevant to the research problem (Mackey & Gass, 2022).

The instruments used to collect data were an observation checklist and field notes. The observation checklist was used to assess students' motivation indicators during classroom activities, while field notes were used to document classroom situations, students' responses, and significant events during the implementation process. These instruments helped the researcher obtain detailed qualitative data regarding students' speaking motivation.

The data were collected through classroom observation conducted during the teaching and learning process. The researcher recorded students' participation and behavioral responses while

implementing the English Zone strategy.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The researcher interpreted the observation checklist results and field notes to identify patterns of students' motivation improvement during the implementation of English Zone in speaking activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This classroom action research was conducted in Class VII D at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam and involved 36 students. The study was implemented in two cycles consisting of four meetings. The researcher collaborated with the English teacher, who acted as an observer during the implementation of the English Zone (EZo). Data were collected through an observation checklist and field notes to identify students' speaking motivation development during the intervention.

Before the implementation, students showed low motivation in speaking English. Most students were hesitant to speak, lacked confidence, and frequently used Bahasa Indonesia during classroom interaction. To measure students' motivational development, the researcher used 13 behavioral indicators adapted from Kormos and Csizér (2021), including voluntary English use, peer encouragement, self-correction, participation, enthusiasm, and willingness to communicate.

The observation results showed gradual improvement across the four meetings. In the first meeting, most motivational indicators were still categorized at lower levels (Q1 = 12.5% and Q2 = 37.5%), indicating limited participation. Students were reluctant to initiate conversations in English and tended to rely on teacher prompts.

However, improvement began to appear in the second meeting. Students started reminding their peers to speak English, used supporting expressions such as "What is the meaning of...?" and "How do you say... in English?", and demonstrated higher enthusiasm during classroom activities. The most significant improvement occurred in Cycle II after several instructional revisions were implemented. The researcher changed pair work into small group discussions, introduced more interactive media, and strengthened the reward system through visible star-based recognition. These adjustments created a more supportive speaking environment. As presented in Table 1, most motivation indicators reached Q4 (87.5%) by Meetings 3 and 4.

Table 1. Students' Speaking Motivation Improvement				
Motivation Indicators	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4
Voluntary English speaking	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q4
Peer reminders	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Use of support expressions	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q4
Enthusiasm during activities	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q4
Participation in discussions	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q4
Self-correction	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Sustained English use	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4

Table 1 demonstrates that students gradually moved from low participation levels toward higher

motivation levels throughout the intervention.

The field notes also supported these findings. During Cycle I, students still appeared anxious and depended heavily on teacher guidance. In contrast, during Cycle II, students became more confident, actively participated in role-play activities, initiated conversations independently, and maintained English communication even when the teacher was not directly monitoring them.

Additionally, students showed greater emotional engagement through smiling, laughing, volunteering to perform, and supporting peers during speaking activities. These findings indicate that the English Zone successfully created a more communicative and motivating classroom atmosphere.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of English Zone effectively improved students' motivation to speak English at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam. The improvement can be seen from students' behavioral transformation from passive learners into more active English speakers throughout the two research cycles. At the beginning of Cycle I, students showed low confidence and limited willingness to communicate. This finding supports Dörnyei (2011), who explains that motivation is influenced by learners' beliefs and previous learning experiences. Students initially hesitated because they were unfamiliar with using English as the main classroom language.

The implementation of classroom rules, rewards, and consequences helped initiate behavioral change. This aligns with Ryan and Deci (2019), who explain that extrinsic motivation can encourage initial participation. The star reward system successfully increased students' willingness to participate in speaking activities. Furthermore, the use of interactive activities such as role-play, games, videos, and group discussions significantly increased students' engagement. This finding supports Nunan (2003), who emphasizes that communicative interaction provides meaningful opportunities for language practice.

The shift from pair work in Cycle I to small-group discussion in Cycle II also contributed significantly to students' motivation improvement. Students felt less anxious, received more peer support, and became more confident when speaking English. This finding aligns with David Nunan, who emphasizes the importance of collaborative communication in language learning. In addition, students demonstrated self-correction behaviors, peer encouragement, and sustained English communication, which reflect characteristics of motivated learners proposed by Penny Ur and Zoltán Dörnyei.

These findings are also consistent with previous studies conducted by Septiyana et al. (2020) and Setyowati (2019), which found that English Zone programs improve students' confidence and speaking participation. However, this study offers novelty by implementing English Zone through Classroom Action Research integrated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), allowing continuous reflection and instructional improvement across cycles. Overall, the findings demonstrate that English Zone is an effective strategy for improving students' motivation in speaking English because it creates an immersive, structured, and supportive learning environment that encourages active communication.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the English Zone (EZo) effectively encouraged students' motivation to speak English at SMP Negeri 1 Sekayam. This finding answers the research objective of investigating how English Zone could improve students' motivation in speaking English. The implementation of EZo created a structured and immersive classroom environment in which students were encouraged to use English consistently through classroom rules, communicative activities, peer interaction, and teacher support. As a result, students gradually showed greater confidence, willingness to communicate, active participation, and consistency in using English during classroom activities.

The findings also revealed that students experienced significant motivational improvement throughout the two action research cycles. At the beginning of the study, students tended to feel anxious, lacked confidence, and were reluctant to speak English. However, after the implementation of interactive speaking activities, group discussions, role-play tasks, rewards, and continuous reinforcement, students became more enthusiastic and willing to participate in English communication. These findings suggest that English Zone not only improved students' speaking motivation but also helped establish positive speaking habits in the classroom.

Based on these findings, English teachers are encouraged to implement English Zone as an alternative strategy to create a more communicative and motivating English learning environment. Consistent classroom rules, supportive feedback, and engaging activities are important to maintain students' motivation. Students are also encouraged to actively participate in speaking activities and use English more confidently without being afraid of making mistakes. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct similar studies in different educational settings, involve a longer implementation period, or use additional instruments such as interviews to gain deeper insights into students' motivation and speaking development.

REFERENCE

- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. Routledge.
- Ciesielska, M., Boström, K. W., & Öhlander, M. (2018). Observation methods. In M. Ciesielska & D. Jemielniak (Eds.), *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies* (pp. 33–52). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_2
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2021). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer.
- Dincer, A. (2017). EFL learners' beliefs about speaking English and being a good speaker: A metaphor analysis. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 5(1), 104–112.

- <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2017.050113>
- Dincer, A., & Yesilyurt, S. (2017). Motivation to speak English: A self-determination theory perspective. *The Journal of Language Learning and Teaching*, 7(1), 1–15. (sesuaikan volume/issue jika kamu punya data jurnal yang lebih akurat)
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Gardner, R. C. (2004). *Attitude/motivation test battery: International AMTB research project*. The University of Western Ontario.
- Ihsan, M. D. (2016). Students' motivation in speaking English. *Journal of English Educators Society*, 1(1), 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v1i1.147>
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner* (3rd ed.). Deakin University Press.
- Kormos, J., & Csizér, K. (2021). Behavioral indicators of motivated language learners: A classroom observation study. *Language Learning*, 71(4), 1015–1040. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12468>
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2022). *Second language research: Methodology and design* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003188414>
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English language teaching*. McGraw-Hill.
- Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2018). A guide to field notes for qualitative research: Context and conversation. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(3), 381–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317697102>
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2019). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.
- Septiyana, L., Widiarti, P., Sari, T. P., Kasih, E. N. K., & Mukaromah, H. A. (2020). English Zone (EZO): A fun activity in learning English speaking skill for young learners. *ALTICS: Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 2(1), 35–43. <https://doi.org/10.36423/altics.v2i1>
- Setyowati, M. S. (2019). Students' perception toward English zone in English study program of IAIN Curup. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 3(4), 506–521. <https://doi.org/10.33369/jcet.3.4.506-521>
- Thuan, P. D. (2021). Factors affecting speaking performance of students at English language teaching and applied linguistics. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 3(5), 68–75. (sesuaikan halaman jika perlu dicek lagi)
- Ur, P. (2009). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ushioda, E. (2021). Motivation and language learning: Affective, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(3), 295–309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168821991657>