

THE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF THE FIRST WINNER TO PREPARE ENGLISH SPEECH COMPETITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Speaking ability in English learning does not only depend on mastery of linguistic elements, but also on communicative competence. It is the ability to apply language knowledge appropriately and effectively in real situations. This study examined the learning strategies employed by a student from MAN 1 Kediri, who won first place in an English speech contest. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach and case study design, with data obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that the student applied various mutually supportive strategies in his efforts to develop his ability to deliver the speech in the contest. He utilized various adaptive learning strategies to prepare for the competition. The strategies include simplifying vocabulary that is considered complex, and conducting repeated revisions to ensure that the flow and clarity of the message are maintained. He also conducted self-evaluations, such as practicing in front of a mirror to monitor facial expressions, intonation, and body movements. In addition, he utilized technology, such as DeepL for pronunciation checks and the Oxford Dictionary to enrich their vocabulary.

Keywords: English Speech Competition, First Winner, Learning Strategies.

INTRODUCTION:

Generation Z, born between 1977 and 2012, grew up in a period of rapid technological advancement. They have grown up with cell phones, social media, and easy internet access, making technology an essential part of their everyday lives. According to Alruthaya et al. (2021), early exposure to technology makes Generation Z adaptive to change and capable of accessing information quickly, yet also dependent on digital media for interaction and learning. Furthermore, Siagian et al. (2024), state that social media for Generation Z is not only a means of communication but also a space for self-expression and the formation of social identity. In line with this view, Fauziah & Aliyah (2024), explain that their ability to use technology supports the learning process by facilitating information searching and processing. However, as noted by Rao (2019), this habit tends to reduce the frequency of face-to-face communication, which may affect their ability to express ideas and emotions directly.

Generation Z is highly skilled at using technology to communicate, but sometimes struggles to develop strong face-to-face communication skills. Regular use of social media has trained them to express themselves in writing rather than verbally. Lissitsa (2025), argue that this situation reflects a mismatch between digital skills and actual interpersonal communication skills. This phenomenon is evident in the lack of confidence some students have when speaking in public or participating in formal communication situations, even though they are active communicators in the digital realm. As a result, in the context of education, educators must prioritize the development of students' oral communication skills because speaking ability not only supports the effectiveness of the learning process but also contributes to the development of critical thinking, collaborative skills, and confidence needed in academic and social environments.

A critical component of language competence that enables students to express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions effectively is speaking skills. According to Nunan (1991), speaking is a productive skill that involves not only mastery of vocabulary and grammar, but also the ability to use language appropriately in real communication situations. Richards & Renandya (2011), emphasizes that effective speaking requires a balance between fluency and accuracy, which can be developed through practice and meaningful interaction. In school settings, speaking skills support students' participant in discussions, presentations, and collaborative tasks, making them essential for academic engagement. However, many students still struggle to speak confidently due to limited vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Azizah & Nurhajati (2016), note that these challenges can be addressed through cognitive strategies-such as practicing and recognizing patterns- and social strategies like asking questions and collaborating with peers, which help improve overall speaking performance.

Given these constraints, teachers must create learning activities that directly help students become more active users of spoken language in real-world situations. Such exercises are vital because focused, meaningful speaking practice has been shown to boost students' confidence and communication skills. An English speech competition is one activity considered suitable, as it provides a structured environment for students to practice, perform, and gradually build their speaking skills. This type of competition supports Thornbury (2002) , theory that excellent speaking performance necessitates frequent practice and constant feedback. Students in this competition are expected not only to understand the content but also to convey concepts with clear pronunciation,

appropriate intonation, and confidence in front of an audience. According to Oxford, 1990), preparing for the competition cannot be done quickly, so students must use

appropriate learning strategies, such as time management, consistent pronunciation practice, searching for relevant references, and building expression and confidence.

Based on the researcher's observations, it was discovered that the first places winner of this English speech competition was a student from MAN 1 Kediri City. Interestingly, his success in winning was not achieved instantly. He has participated in a similar competition the previous year, but was unsuccessful. This experience was not reason to give up, but instead became a driving force to learn and prepare better. He demonstrated a never give up attitude and a commitment to improving his skills through more focused practice. After this failure, this student began to understand that performing optimally in competitions requires the right learning strategy. He began paying attention to how to compose more effective speech scripts, regularly practicing pronunciation and intonation, and increasing his confidence when speaking in front of others. In addition to studying independently, he also actively sought feedback from his teachers and peers to identify areas that needed improvement. This consistent and planned learning approach was a crucial part of his preparation process.

One effort that can be made to enrich students' learning experience is to hold a competition that focuses on developing language skills, especially the ability to speak English. One form of activity is a speech contest. This platform encourages students to express their thoughts publicly in a structured and persuasive manner. This activity was held at SMAN 1 Kediri by *JagoBahasa* in collaboration with English teachers from secondary schools and vocational schools throughout the city of Kediri. This competition is not only a performance-based event, but also an educational tool designed to enhance communication skills in real world contexts. Such activities are critical, as English language skills are the primary factors that promote academic success worldwide.

This competition is intended to provide a platform for students to share their ideas, opinions, and aspirations through exciting, persuasive speeches. Participants are assigned a theme to develop into a speech script, which is then presented to the judges and audience in a cohesive and entertaining framework. This competition evaluates several areas, including content (how to produce material), language (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary), and delivery (gesture, expression, body language, eye

contact). These components are critical for assessing language skills and the speaker's ability to connect with the audience and convey the message effectively.

This condition encouraged the researcher to look into the first winner's learning tactics in preparation for the competition. This study seeks to provide an overview of good preparation patterns by analyzing the procedures, methods, and learning habits used. As a result, the goal of this study is to describe the learning strategies employed by the first winner of MAN 1 Kediri City to prepare for the English speech competition.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method, where the researcher served as the primary instrument, utilizes triangulation in data collection methods, data analysis from empirical evidence to theoretical frameworks, and prioritizes meaning over quantitative metrics Ary et al. (2010). The purpose of this study is to investigate and explore in depth the learning strategies used by an Islamic boarding school student in their preparation for English speech competitions, especially in the context of limited resources, technology, and learning time. The type of research used is a case study. Case studies were chosen because they allow the researcher to obtain detailed and in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon being studied, as well as explore the meaning behind the strategies and experiences of participants Creswell (2013). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. The subjects in this study were one Islamic boarding school student who participated in a regional English speech competition.

The main focus of observation in this study was the learning activities of Islamic boarding school students during the preparation process for the English speech contest, including their interactions with their mentors, peers, and the learning environment at the Islamic boarding school. Observations were conducted to capture the learning strategies of the student applied directly in real-life situations. Interviews were used as the primary technique to gather in-depth information from student participants, mentors, and fellow students involved in the preparation process. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to ensure the data obtained was flexible yet focused according to the research focus. Furthermore, documentation was used to support the findings from the observations and interviews. The documents analysed included speech practice notes, speech scripts prepared by students, teacher notes related to the guidance process, and

the speech contest assessment rubric provided by the organizers. This document analysis aimed to strengthen the data and provide a concrete picture of the students' preparation process for the contest.

The data analysis technique used in this study is interactive analysis, as proposed by Miles & Hubberman (in Sugiyono, 2013), where the data analysis process is carried out simultaneously with the data collection process. There are four stages in the data analysis process: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. From the results of data reduction and presentation, the researcher could draw conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Based on the data collected, it was found that the strategies implemented included two main focuses, namely, (1) strategies for developing speech material which include selecting ideas, compiling structures, and managing language; and (2) strategies in the aspect of delivering the speech, both verbally and nonverbally.

A. Strategy for developing speech content

The strategies used by the student in preparing the content of his speech consist of three main components: determining ideas, developing the structure, and managing the language. These components were carried out independently and adjusted to his personal learning style, the availability of references, and the support he received from his teacher, mother, and tutor. The data show that the student did not rely solely on his initial understanding but actively sought additional sources to refine and strengthen his speech material.

1. Determining Ideas

When selecting ideas for his speech, the student preferred simple, familiar topics closely connected to real situations he had observed. He stated that he usually chose topics that were "*gampang*" or easy to develop because they came from actual experiences or common issues he saw around him. As he explained:

"Ya itu si depends ke refrensi yang tak cari, atau nggak biasanya dari ide-ide yang nyata, pokoknya yang sekiranya bakal gampang lah."

(That depends on the references I look for, or sometimes from fundamental ideas—whatever feels easier to develop.)

For example, when preparing a speech about the difficulties students face in learning English, he began with issues observable in his school environment—such as students' low confidence, limited vocabulary, and differences in prior exposure to English. These real-life conditions served as the foundation for constructing logical arguments in his speech.

In addition to drawing from personal observations, the student also strengthened his ideas by searching for supporting information online. He mentioned that when allowed to access the internet, he looked for articles, explanations, or common reasons to help him elaborate on his topic. However, he found that online sources often use complex language, so he combined them with more straightforward, real-world explanations. He said:

“Nanti kan pasti banyak alasan lain, tapi kan umumnya alasan di Internet agak susah bahasanya, jadi dicampur tuh sama alasan dunia nyatanya.”

(There are many reasons online, but the language is usually tricky, so I mix them with reasons from real life.)

This process indicates the use of cognitive strategies, especially elaboration, where the student integrates information from different sources—his own experiences and online materials—to create a more complete and convincing idea. He used the internet not to rely on it entirely, but to support and add variety to his reasoning in his speech.

Furthermore, when selecting a topic, the student deliberately avoided concepts that were too abstract or difficult to develop. He concentrated on topics that were manageable within his time constraints and aligned with his level of understanding. This strategic approach allowed him to write more comfortably while also ensuring that he had sufficient knowledge to deliver a relevant speech.

This approach to idea generation consisted of three interconnected steps: selecting familiar, realistic topics, combining personal observations with web sources, and distilling the material to make it more understandable to the audience. This helped the student generate thoughts that were relevant, easy to explain, and strong enough to present in a competitive setting.

2. Developing a Structure

The student did not begin by creating a formal written blueprint for the framework of his speech. Instead, he used the structure he had already visualized.

He noted that the sequence of a speech—beginning with welcome, introduction, main themes, and conclusion—was already familiar to him, thus he did not see the necessity to compose a separate blueprint before penning the entire script. He stated,

"Kalau saya sih biasanya langsung nulis, Kak. The structure of pidatonya sudah kebayang di kepala jadi nggak perlu bikin kerangka dulu; sambil nulis bisa sambil nyusun alurnya."

(I generally start writing. The format of the speech is already in my head; therefore, I don't need to outline it. While writing, I simultaneously organize the flow.)

This suggests that the student employed metacognitive methods to prepare and organize the order of ideas while writing mentally. Even without a written blueprint, he used an internal framework to keep his discourse intelligible and logically related. His planning took place mentally rather than on paper, yet it nonetheless served as an organized guide for his writing process.

During the drafting phase, he altered the structural flow in response to input. For example, after his mother and teacher evaluated his script, they suggested removing several unnecessary paragraphs. This technique helped him reorganize the framework so that each section of the speech contributed directly to the central theme while staying within the time constraints.

In addition, the student improved his comprehension of speech structure by watching online speech videos. He learned to strengthen his own thought organization by observing how other speakers began their talks, moved between points, and concluded their statements. He added that watching these films helped him see examples of successful introductions and transitions.

Overall, his speech structure technique was built on an internalized pattern of speech organization reinforced by frequent exposure to speech models and feedback from others, rather than a written template.

3. Managing Language

The student focused on grammar, vocabulary selection, clarity, and naturalness when regulating his speaking language. He often updated his script based on feedback from his teacher, tutor, and mother. These adjustments were made to ensure that the speech was succinct, comprehensible, and met the competition's criteria.

He frequently sought grammar help from his teacher or mother, and he occasionally consulted a tutor. He noted that he avoided leaning too heavily on AI

tools to ensure that the language sounded natural rather than overly professional. As he stated,

"Untuk grammar, saya sering minta bantuan Miss, kadang ibuku." I'm relying heavily on AI to achieve more natural results."

(I frequently seek grammar advice from my teacher or mother. I avoid leaning too heavily on AI, so the outcome sounds more natural.)

To expand his vocabulary, he used the Oxford Dictionary to hunt out words that could improve his voice. However, if he came across words that were too complex to pronounce, he reduced them. This increased his confidence throughout the delivery and ensured the language remained accessible.

In addition to grammar and vocabulary, the student reviewed the speech's stylistic qualities. He repeatedly changed elements that felt overly repetitive, particularly the opening and ending sections. He watched recordings of effective presenters using hooks, rhetorical questions, and emotive closings and incorporated these methods into his own speech.

Although he did not record his practice, he assessed linguistic clarity by frequently reading the speech aloud. This allowed him to detect poor phrasing and practice speaking difficult words.

Overall, his language management technique blends cognitive strategies (practicing, rewriting, and reducing language) with social strategies (obtaining feedback). These efforts enabled him to improve the linguistic quality of his speech without relying on advanced technical instruments.

B. Speech Delivery Strategy (Verbal and Nonverbal)

In preparation for the speech competition, the student used both verbal and nonverbal tactics to improve his performance. These tactics were implemented independently and tailored to the restrictions of his environment, available resources, and input from those around him.

To improve verbal delivery, particularly pronunciation and fluency, the student worked individually with basic and accessible strategies. He used technologies like DeepL to determine how words should be spoken. When he encountered unfamiliar or challenging words, he used the app to check their pronunciation. His explanation was this:

"Untuk pronunciation, aku menggunakan aplikasi atau tools seperti DeepL."

(For pronunciation, I utilize apps or programs such as DeepL.)

In addition to employing digital tools, he read the screenplay multiple times to improve his fluency. He practiced aloud several times, focusing on which words needed emphasis, where to place pauses, and how to alter his intonation so that the speech did not sound repetitive. This regular practice helped him become more comfortable with the pace of English phrases.

He also avoided relying heavily on AI-generated content to ensure his voice and wording remained natural. He preferred going over the script with his teacher, mother, or tutor to fix pronunciation and refine complex passages. This collaborative approach enabled him to identify errors that he would not have noticed on his own.

Although he did not document his practice sessions, he assessed his progress by reading the speech aloud and noting which passages remained awkward. He continued to practice these parts until he could deliver them more effortlessly. Overall, his verbal practice style incorporates cognitive techniques (repetition and pronunciation practice).

The student used a mirror to practice nonverbal communication skills, including gestures, facial expressions, and body language. By examining himself, he became aware of whether his expressions were rigid, lifeless, or lacking emotional engagement. This technique enabled him to self-correct and gradually adapt his motions to appear more natural and expressive during the discourse. It was reported:

"Aku latihan dengan membayangkan diriku sedang berbicara langsung ke audiens didepan cermin sambil bacanya diulang ulang."

(To rehearse, I imagine myself speaking directly to the audience in front of a mirror while repeating the speech.)

In addition to using a mirror, he asked a buddy with prior experience in speech competitions to witness his practice and offer feedback on gestures and emotional delivery. This peer assistance helped him improve his movements and learn how to express himself more effectively. The friend pointed out that his gestures appeared too rigid and encouraged him to use more natural body language.

The learner evaluated his development by self-assessment. He evaluated his practice success based on two criteria: (1) his ability to deliver the speech without a script, and (2) his natural and confident appearance in front of the mirror.

If he still felt less expressive or detected awkward gestures, he went over the relevant areas until he was pleased. He added that he occasionally requested a friend to listen and provide input when he needed it.

This continual cycle of practice, appraisal, and modification helped him gain confidence over time. Rather than focusing exclusively on memorization, he practiced delivering the message with expression, proper emphasis, and relaxed gestures, making the speech more engaging for the audience.

Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate that the student employed a wide range of language learning strategies throughout the preparation of his speech, and these strategies closely align with Oxford's (1990) taxonomy. His approach shows that learning strategies are not used in isolation, but rather in combination, supporting each other to improve both the content and delivery of his performance. The strategies identified in the results section—developing ideas, structuring the speech, managing language, and practicing verbal and nonverbal delivery—illustrate an integrated and systematic learning process shaped by the student's personal preferences, available resources, and social support.

The student's tendency to select familiar, simple, and real-life topics reflects his use of cognitive strategies, particularly elaboration and organization. By grounding his arguments in everyday observations and, when available, reinforcing them with online sources, he demonstrated an ability to integrate new information with prior knowledge. Oxford (1990) explains that cognitive strategies help learners manipulate and understand language through activities such as summarizing, reasoning, and comparing. The student's habit of combining real experiences with digital references clearly exemplifies this. Furthermore, his focus on manageable topics demonstrates strategic awareness; he intentionally avoided ideas that were too abstract or difficult to develop within the limited time frame. This suggests that his cognitive strategy use was deliberate rather than accidental.

The student's approach to speech structure emphasizes metacognitive methods. Even without a documented blueprint, he used a clear conceptual structure to guide his writing. This internal preparation demonstrates his ability to organize learning before starting a task, a key component of metacognitive strategy use Oxford, (1990). His decision to change his structure after receiving input from his teacher and mother demonstrates monitoring and evaluation, two other essential components of metacognition. Using speech recordings as inspiration demonstrates his reflective engagement with the learning process. Rather than writing

unconsciously, he actively compared his structure to models from skilled speakers, making deliberate adjustments.

The student's method of simplifying language and adapting complex sentences exemplifies the application of compensatory strategies. According to Oxford (1990), these are approaches learners use to bridge language knowledge gaps, particularly when they lack specific vocabulary or grammatical precision. By substituting complex words with simpler ones, the student improved clarity and reduced anxiety during the presentation. This demonstrates both linguistic and performance awareness: he did not want complex terminology to impede his fluency. His use of the Oxford Dictionary to seek precise words, paired with simplification if needed, exemplifies a balanced and flexible approach to dealing with linguistic limits.

The learner used cognitive skills to manage grammar and revise language once more, but this time through practice, analysis, and revision. He continually improved passages that were "monotonous" or "not natural," demonstrating intentional manipulation of language material. However, his unwillingness to rely extensively on AI tools stands out. To keep his tone natural, he chose to consult with his teacher, mother, and tutor. This reliance on human input reflects not only a social approach, but also a recognition that Authenticity in oral performance cannot be accomplished solely through computerized correction methods.

The verbal and nonverbal delivery tactics discussed in the findings section are compatible with both memory and affective strategies. His frequent reading of the script, sometimes multiple times within a single practice session, demonstrates the application of memory methods to internalize patterns and increase recall. According to Oxford (1990), repetition and revisiting are essential components of memory methods, as the student clearly demonstrated. Simultaneously, practicing in front of a mirror is an excellent way to build self-confidence, reduce uneasiness, and become more familiar with one's own expressions. The student reduced his fear by analyzing his movements, emotional tone, and physical presence as he became more at ease with the performance.

Social techniques play an essential role in his preparation. Seeking input from a friend with experience in speech competitions supplied him with helpful ideas that he could not have gained through self-practice alone. Oxford (1990) emphasizes social methods as critical for facilitating learning through interaction, clarification, and collaboration. The student's openness to seeking feedback, listening to

recommendations, and adapting his delivery demonstrates active participation in social learning. His collaboration with his teacher, mother, and tutor on grammar and word choice highlights the importance of social support in improving his speech.

Overall, the results indicate that the student's preparation approach was both systematic and highly adaptive. To meet the various demands of speech writing and delivery, he used a variety of tactics, including cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, memory, emotive, and social. His approach demonstrates how learners can efficiently control their own learning even without substantial technological support. More importantly, the combination of these tactics displays the student's ability to accept responsibility for his own learning, evaluate his progress, and make purposeful modifications to improve both content and performance. These findings corroborate Oxford's (1990) claim that successful language learning requires the coordinated employment of a variety of methods that complement one another to achieve total communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

Based on these findings, the student successfully improved their English-speaking skills in preparing for speech contest by using several strategies, namely cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, memory, emotional, and social strategies. Their ability to choose familiar vocabulary, organize speech structure cognitively, and regularly modify language during the learning process. In addition, his practice routine, which included practicing aloud for fluency, using basic pronunciation tools such as DeepL, and observing his performance in a mirror, demonstrated how he effectively adapted his techniques to his needs and available resources. His teacher, mother, tutor, and a friend with prior speaking experience all helped him deliver a clear, natural, and enthusiastic speech.

Based on the results, various suggestions can be provided to students preparing for speech competitions, particularly those with limited resources. Students are encouraged to develop independent learning habits, such as revising drafts regularly, simplifying complex vocabulary, and practicing constant repetition to improve fluency. Creating small support systems with teachers, friends, or family members can also provide valuable feedback for developing both verbal and nonverbal communication. Maintaining drive, discipline, and introspective awareness is also necessary. Students

can effectively improve their speaking skills with appropriate tactics and a positive attitude, regardless of environmental obstacles.

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