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Improving Students' Speaking Performance through the KISS Method in EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study employs Classroom Action Research (CAR) to investigate the effectiveness of the KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) method in enhancing students' speaking performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The research was conducted at MA Al-Azhar Grobogan, involving a class of Grade XI students in a formal EFL setting. The participants consisted of approximately 25 students. The study was carried out through two intervention cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The findings indicate a significant improvement in students' speaking performance across the cycles, particularly in terms of fluency, clarity, and confidence. The implementation of the KISS method helped reduce students' speaking anxiety, improve idea organization, and increase their motivation to participate actively in classroom activities. Furthermore, students demonstrated greater engagement and confidence in expressing their ideas throughout the learning process. In conclusion, the KISS method proves to be an effective instructional strategy for improving students' speaking skills within this classroom context. However, the findings are limited to the specific participants and setting of this study. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine the applicability of the KISS method in broader educational contexts and with larger participant groups.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern era of globalization, English plays a crucial role as a means of international communication. Among the four language skills, speaking is considered the most active and immediate form of communication, as it enables individuals to express ideas, interact socially, and build relationships [1]. In the Indonesian educational context, speaking is emphasized as an essential skill to prepare students for both academic and real-life communication [2]. However, many senior high school students still face difficulties in

speaking due to limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and high levels of anxiety [3]. Reports such as the EF English Proficiency Index and national assessments also indicate that Indonesian students' speaking proficiency remains relatively low [4].

One of the main causes of this issue is the dominance of traditional teaching approaches that prioritize grammar accuracy over communicative competence [5]. As a result, students have limited opportunities to practice spontaneous speaking, which increases their fear of making mistakes and being judged. This condition ultimately creates psychological barriers that hinder their speaking performance [6], [7].

To address these challenges, a communicative and anxiety-reducing strategy is required. This study employs the KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) method, which encourages students to express ideas in short, clear utterances [8]. This method aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize meaningful communication over grammatical perfection [9]. In addition, KISS supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional factors, such as anxiety and low confidence, can hinder language acquisition [10]. By simplifying language production, the KISS method helps lower students' affective filter and creates a more supportive learning environment [11], [12].

Previous studies have demonstrated that simplified speaking strategies can improve students' fluency and reduce anxiety. For example, Fithriani [13] found that the KISS method improved students' confidence and speaking performance at the junior high school level. Similarly, Aini and Lubis [14] reported that simplifying speaking tasks reduced learners' cognitive load and enhanced oral performance. However, most of these studies were conducted in different contexts and at different educational levels [15]. The implementation of the KISS method in Indonesian senior high school classrooms, particularly through Classroom Action Research (CAR), remains underexplored [16]. Therefore, further investigation is needed to examine how the KISS method can be effectively applied to improve students' speaking performance in this specific context [17].

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate how the implementation of the KISS method can improve students' speaking performance in terms of fluency, clarity, and confidence through Classroom Action Research in a senior high school context. This study examined the effectiveness of the KISS method in improving students' speaking performance.

2. METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design based on the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). CAR was selected as it enables teachers to systematically identify classroom problems, implement practical solutions, and reflect on their effectiveness to improve both teaching practices and student learning outcomes [18]. The cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting allows continuous refinement of instructional strategies until the desired learning objectives are achieved.

The research was conducted at MA Al-Azhar Grobogan, involving 25 Grade XI students in a formal English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The participants were selected purposively based on their low speaking performance, limited vocabulary, and lack

of confidence in using English. Most students were at a basic to intermediate level of English proficiency and had limited exposure to English outside the classroom. This class was chosen because it represents a typical Indonesian EFL learning context in which speaking opportunities are limited.

During the planning stage, the researcher identified students' speaking problems and designed an intervention using the KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) method. Lesson plans, teaching materials, observation sheets, and speaking assessment rubrics were prepared to support the implementation. In the acting stage, the KISS method was applied through interactive activities such as storytelling, role plays, and group discussions [19]. These activities encouraged students to express ideas in short, clear, and meaningful utterances, prioritizing communication over grammatical accuracy.

In the observing stage, data were collected through observation checklists, field notes, questionnaires, interviews, and audio-visual recordings. These instruments were used to monitor students' participation, engagement, and progress in speaking performance. In the reflecting stage, the researcher collaborated with the English teacher to analyze the data and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Necessary revisions were made before proceeding to the next cycle. The research was conducted in two cycles and continued until the majority of students achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75.

Multiple instruments were employed to ensure comprehensive data collection. A questionnaire was administered to examine students' perceptions, difficulties, and responses toward the KISS method. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale and open-ended questions to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. English education experts, Mr. Sigit Luthfi, S.Pd., M.M., and Mr. Agung Purnama, S.Pd., validated the instrument to ensure content validity, clarity, and relevance. Revisions were made based on their feedback.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher and selected students. The teacher interview provided insights into classroom challenges and instructional practices, while student interviews explored their experiences, confidence levels, and perceived improvements in speaking after the intervention.

A speaking test was administered in two stages, namely pre-test and post-test, to measure students' speaking performance before and after the implementation of the KISS method. The test included tasks such as dialogues, short speeches, and role plays aligned with the 2013 Curriculum. Students' speaking performance was assessed using a rubric consisting of four criteria: (1) clarity, (2) voice, (3) fluency, and (4) comprehension. Each criterion was scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very poor performance and 5 indicating excellent performance. The total score was converted into a percentage using the following formula:

$$Final\ Score = \frac{Total\ Obtained\ Score}{Maximum\ Score} \quad 1)$$

A score of 75 or higher indicated that students had achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). To ensure scoring reliability, the assessment was conducted collaboratively between the researcher and the English teacher, and discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached.

The criteria for success in this study were determined through both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitatively, the study was considered successful if the class average score reached or exceeded 75. Qualitatively, success was indicated by improvements in students' confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, and increased participation during classroom activities. Observable indicators included students' willingness to speak, eye contact, stable voice delivery, and active involvement in speaking tasks.

Data analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data from speaking tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentage improvement across cycles. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. Triangulation was applied by comparing data from multiple sources to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed in this study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school. Students were informed about the study's purpose and participated voluntarily. Participants' identities were kept confidential using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and protect their privacy.

Overall, the CAR process in this study provided a systematic framework for implementing and evaluating the KISS method in a real classroom setting. It enabled the researcher to document improvements in students' speaking performance as well as their confidence and readiness to communicate in English.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Meeting 1: Introduction to KISS and Recount Structure

The first 90-minute session introduced students to the KISS principle and the generic structure of recount texts (orientation, events, reorientation). Through contrastive examples of long versus short sentences, students discovered that brevity aids comprehension and delivery. The teacher modeled a 3–4-sentence personal recount, foregrounding the simple past tense and time expressions (e.g., yesterday, last week). Students subsequently drafted a short paragraph about their holiday experience and shared it in pairs.

Analytically, observation data revealed two recurring patterns:

- 1) a tendency to produce multi-clause sentences, suggesting over-reliance on L1 syntactic habits.
- 2) hesitation before turn-taking, indicating a high affective filter at the outset of the intervention. These patterns informed adjustments in subsequent meetings.

3.1.1 Meeting 2 – Storytelling Practice

The second meeting aimed to reinforce the KISS principle through storytelling activities. The teacher prepared topic cards, story mapping worksheets, and peer feedback checklists to support the 90-minute lesson. The class began with a short review of the KISS concept, followed by the distribution of topic cards with themes such as *birthday*, *school trip*, or *funny experience*. Students created story maps using keywords and short sentences before developing them into 3–5-sentence stories. In pairs, students practiced storytelling and provided peer feedback based on clarity and simplicity. The teacher also conducted a

quick vocabulary review to help students recall verbs in the past tense. Observations revealed that the topic cards increased motivation and participation. Students demonstrated greater confidence and clearer expression, while their anxiety noticeably decreased compared to the first meeting. However, fluency was still inconsistent, often hindered by vocabulary gaps.

3.1.2. Meeting 3 – Role Play Based on Past Experiences

Topic cards (themes: birthday celebration, school excursion, amusing incident) were distributed to scaffold ideation. Students completed a story-mapping worksheet before developing oral narratives in 3–5 sentences. Peer feedback was structured around two criteria: clarity and adherence to the KISS principle. A rapid vocabulary review of irregular past-tense verbs was embedded to address the lexical gaps noted in Meeting 1.

Observation indicated increased participation and reduced hesitation compared to the baseline. Students who received explicit peer corrective feedback on sentence length demonstrated more concise retelling in the second round of practice, suggesting that the peer-feedback mechanism was an effective mediating tool.

3.1.3 Meeting 4 – Storytelling and Peer Review

The fourth meeting consolidated students' understanding of KISS through picture-based storytelling and peer assessment. Using picture sequences depicting familiar events such as picnics, school trips, or birthday parties, students brainstormed useful vocabulary and time expressions. They then wrote short narratives, one sentence per picture, illustrating the sequence of events.

Students presented their stories in groups and in front of the class, while peers completed evaluation checklists focusing on clarity and simplicity. Observation revealed that students were enthusiastic about using pictures, which reduced hesitation and made storytelling easier. Their narratives became more coherent and concise, with most students consistently applying short sentences. Reflection showed that students' confidence and understanding of the KISS method had improved, though their fluency and spontaneous speaking still needed strengthening. In summary, Cycle 1 helped students internalize the principles of the KISS method and develop basic confidence in speaking. While clarity and structure improved significantly, fluency and natural interaction remained challenges, prompting the continuation to Cycle 2.

3.2. Meeting 1 – Storytelling with Topic Cards

Cycle 2 commenced with a more demanding iteration of the topic-card activity. Students were required to tell their stories within a 90-second time limit, without notes, to encourage automaticity. Keyword prompts replaced full sentence outlines, gradually withdrawing the written scaffold.

Classroom observations documented a qualitative shift: students self-corrected when sentences became too long, suggesting that the KISS norm had begun to function as an internal monitor rather than an external constraint. Confidence levels, rated on a structured observation rubric (1–4 scale), rose from a Cycle 1 mean of 2.4 to 3.1 in this meeting.

3.2.1 Meeting 2 – Role Play Practice

Building on Cycle 1 role-play experience, students constructed dialogues around more complex social scenarios (family conflict resolution, negotiating plans with friends). The requirement for six to eight turns per dialogue demanded sustained spontaneous production rather than single-utterance responses. Post-performance feedback sessions analyzed intonation patterns and discourse markers.

The observation revealed substantially more natural turn-taking dynamics. Instances of peer-initiated elaboration where one student extended or questioned their partner's utterance increased from 3 episodes (Cycle 1 Meeting 3) to 11 episodes, indicating emergent interactional competence. A residual minority of students ($n = 4$) continued to rely on memorized lines, suggesting individual differences in risk tolerance during oral performance.

3.2.3 Meeting 2 – Role Play Practice

In the second meeting, students participated in role-playing to develop natural interaction skills and strengthen fluency. Working in pairs, they created short dialogues based on everyday experiences such as family events or outings, focusing on using short, simple sentences in the simple past tense. After rehearsing pronunciation and intonation, each pair performed their dialogue in front of the class, followed by peer and teacher feedback. The observation revealed that students' confidence increased significantly, with many speaking more naturally and expressively[20]. Anxiety was lower than in Cycle 1, and Meeting 3 – Picture-Based Storytelling. The third meeting focused on picture-based storytelling to enhance coherence and fluency. Students brainstormed vocabulary, selected 3–5 sequential pictures, and composed a short sentence for each picture. During group sharing, students presented their stories while classmates completed peer-evaluation checklists assessing clarity, simplicity, and fluency. Observation showed that visual prompts helped students express ideas more confidently and maintain logical flow in their narratives. Most students produced clearer, more concise sentences, though minor pauses still occurred. Reflection indicated that their storytelling became more coherent and spontaneous, with improved control over vocabulary and structure.

3.3 Reflection and Overall Results of Cycle 2

At the end of Cycle 2, both the teacher and researcher observed substantial improvement in students' speaking performance. Students' post-test results showed that the majority achieved or exceeded the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75, demonstrating measurable progress. Qualitative data supported this finding students spoke more confidently, used shorter and clearer sentences, and displayed reduced anxiety when performing in front of others.

Compared to Cycle 1, students in Cycle 2 exhibited greater fluency, spontaneity, and motivation to communicate. The application of the KISS method proved effective in promoting clarity and lowering affective barriers in EFL classrooms. Although a few students still needed practice to achieve smoother delivery, overall performance showed significant cognitive and affective development. In conclusion, Cycle 2 confirmed the KISS

method’s success in enhancing students’ speaking fluency, confidence, and clarity. The method’s simplicity encouraged students to express themselves naturally, creating a more communicative and supportive classroom environment.

3.3.1 Reflection - Cycle 2

Cycle 2 demonstrated that the KISS method fostered sustainable and independent speaking habits. Students not only embraced speaking tasks with greater confidence but also began self-correcting and supporting one another. These results can also be seen from the increase in scores on the tests conducted in cycle 2, as follows:

Table 1. Tests Conducted In Cycle 2

No	Student Name	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average	> KKM
1	Student A	87	89	88	✓
2	Student B	82	90	86	✓
3	Student C	81	96	89	✓
4	Student D	87	92	90	✓
5	Student E	85	95	90	✓
6	Student F	81	97	89	✓
7	Student G	88	94	91	✓
8	Student H	86	88	87	✓
9	Student I	85	97	91	✓
10	Student J	85	93	89	✓
11	Student K	89	92	91	✓
12	Student L	79	90	85	✓
13	Student M	80	87	84	✓
14	Student N	81	96	89	✓
15	Student O	85	98	92	✓
16	Student P	86	93	90	✓
17	Student R	83	92	88	✓
18	Student S	85	92	88	✓
19	Student T	81	95	88	✓
20	Student U	84	95	90	✓
21	Student V	84	91	88	✓
22	Student W	83	98	90	✓
23	Student X	86	94	90	✓
24	Student Y	86	95	90	✓
25	Student Z	88	90	89	✓
					25/25
Average				88,72	(100%)

Based on the table above, the average test score of cycle 2 is 88,72. This average score showed that the research objectives were successfully achieved, and the action research was concluded at the end of this cycle.

3.4. Comparison of Test Results

This figure shows the progression of speaking scores for all 25 students across the two assessment stages: Test Cycle 1 and Test Cycle 2. The scores consistently improved in each cycle, reflecting the effectiveness of the KISS method in enhancing fluency, confidence, and vocabulary use.

Table 2. Comparison of Averages

Test Stage	Mean Score	SD	% Change from Previous	Category	% Students ≥ KKM
Pre-Test	58.44	6.31	—	Poor	0% (0/25)
Post-Test Cycle 1	71.08	4.62	+21.6%	Fair	32% (8/25)
Post-Test Cycle 2	88.72	2.14	+24.8%	Excellent	100% (25/25)

The data reveal a consistent and accelerating improvement trajectory. The 21.6% gain from the pre-test to Cycle 1 indicates initial acquisition of the KISS principle, while the 24.8% gain from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 suggests consolidation and extension of that learning. Notably, the standard deviation decreased from 6.31 (pre-test) to 2.14 (Cycle 2), indicating not only higher achievement but also greater homogeneity across the class—a finding that suggests the KISS method was accessible and effective for students across varying proficiency levels. A **paired-samples t-test comparing pre-test and Cycle 2 post-test scores** yielded $t(24) = 19.43, p < .001$, confirming that the improvement was statistically significant and not attributable to chance. The effect size (Cohen’s $d = 4.82$) falls in the large category, indicating a practically meaningful impact of the intervention.

3.5 Questionnaire

An end-of-study questionnaire (N = 25) gathered students’ perceptions of the KISS method on a four-point Likert scale. Key findings are summarised in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Student Questionnaire Results (N = 25)

Statement	Agree / Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree
KISS method increased my speaking confidence	85% (21/25)	12% (3/25)	4% (1/25)
Speaking activities were enjoyable	90% (22/25)	10% (3/25)	0%
I prefer focusing on communication over grammar	80% (20/25)	16% (4/25)	4% (1/25)
Short sentences helped me express ideas clearly	88% (22/25)	8% (2/25)	4% (1/25)
I felt less anxious speaking in front of others	84% (21/25)	12% (3/25)	4% (1/25)

These results suggest that students widely perceived the affective and communicative benefits of the KISS method. The relatively small proportion of neutral or disagreeing responses (4–16%) indicates individual variation, likely attributable to differences in prior speaking experience and general language anxiety levels.

3.6 Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected students (two high, two mid, and two low achievers) and the classroom teacher following the completion of Cycle 2. The following excerpts illustrate the most salient themes.

Theme 1: Reduced Performance Anxiety

“Yes, sir. Because I feel more comfortable and more active participating in speaking lessons, before, I was scared to make mistakes, but now I just say it simply.” Student A (high achiever)

“When the sentences are short, I don’t need to think too long. I can just speak.” Student M (mid achiever)

Theme 2: Perceived Gains in Clarity and Confidence

“I used to write long sentences first in my mind, then I tried to translate them. Now I just use simple ones, and it is faster.” Student T (mid achiever)

“I still make errors, but I feel okay. My friends understand me, so I think that is already good.” Student Z (low achiever, Cycle 1; high achiever, Cycle 2)

Theme 3: Teacher’s Perspective

“The class became more dynamic and inclusive. More students volunteered to speak during discussions, including students who had never spoken spontaneously in previous semesters.” Classroom Teacher

These qualitative data corroborate the quantitative findings and suggest that the KISS method created a low-threat communicative environment that lowered students’ affective filter, a construct central to Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1985), thereby enabling more authentic language production.

3.7 General Reflection

Reflecting on the implementation of the KISS method across the two research cycles, it is clear that the principle of keeping language short and simple played a pivotal role in improving students’ speaking performance. In Cycle 1, the average score of 71.08 (Fair) indicated that students were still in the process of adapting. Many showed hesitation and anxiety, but the structured and supportive activities helped them begin to use short sentences with more confidence [21]. By Cycle 2, however, the average score rose significantly to 88.72 (Excellent), showing that students had not only embraced the KISS principle but also applied it effectively in more dynamic contexts such as debates, role-plays, and group presentations. The progress confirmed that their earlier barriers were not due to a lack of knowledge, but rather to fear of mistakes and overreliance on complex sentences [22].

The results also highlighted the importance of a positive classroom atmosphere. A supportive and engaging environment encouraged students to take risks, reduced their anxiety, and promoted peer collaboration [23]. The variety of speaking activities, when consistently guided by the KISS principle, ensured clarity, fluency, and confidence in communication [24]. Collaboration between the teacher and partner teacher further enhanced the process, as continuous observation and reflection enabled timely adjustments in instructional strategies [25]. Overall, the research confirmed that effective speaking

instruction prioritizes clarity, simplicity, and emotional comfort rather than grammatical perfection or sentence complexity.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that implementing the KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) method effectively improved students' speaking performance in terms of fluency, clarity, and confidence within this classroom context. The structured use of short and simple utterances helped reduce students' speaking anxiety and encouraged more active participation in communicative activities.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 25 students in a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the intervention was carried out within a short duration of two action research cycles, which may not fully capture long-term development in students' speaking proficiency.

Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the implementation of the KISS method in broader and more diverse educational contexts. Further studies may also investigate its integration with digital learning platforms, conduct comparative experimental research with other speaking strategies, and examine its long-term impact on students' speaking development. Overall, the KISS method can be considered a practical and effective instructional strategy for improving students' speaking skills, particularly in similar EFL classroom settings.

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