

## THE APPLICATION OF CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING APPROACH IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITY AT MTsN 2 KUNINGAN WEST JAVA

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**APA Citation:** Solihat, D., Fadhly, F. Z., & Suhartini, C. (2024). The application of content and language integrated learning approach in improving students' english speaking ability at MTSN 2 Kuningan West Java. *Indonesian Journal Learning and Instruction*, 7(2), 149-158. 10.25134/ijli.v7i2.11706

Received: 19-06-2024

Accepted: 15-08-2024

Published: 30-10-2024

**Abstract:** In response to the growing need for communicative English competence among students in Indonesian Islamic junior high schools (MTs), this study investigates the effectiveness of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in improving students' English speaking ability. Conducted at MTsN 2 Kuningan, West Java, this Classroom Action Research (CAR) employed Mertler's four-stage model—planning, action, development, and reflection—across three iterative cycles from July to November 2023. A total of 32 seventh-grade students participated in 12 sessions integrating subject content with English language instruction, using materials from *English for Nusantara* and supplemental content. Data were collected through speaking performance tests, classroom observations, and student interviews, and analyzed using both descriptive qualitative methods and basic statistical techniques. Findings showed significant improvement in students' speaking proficiency: from 50% achievement in Cycle 1 to 75% in Cycle 2, and 96% in Cycle 3. Students demonstrated increased vocabulary mastery, improved pronunciation, greater confidence, and enhanced fluency. The CLIL approach not only elevated language outcomes but also increased student engagement and participation. The study concludes that CLIL is an effective strategy for enhancing speaking skills in MTs contexts. It recommends the integration of content-based instruction with structured oral interaction and the use of digital and visual media to support CLIL implementation. Further research is encouraged to explore long-term impacts and to replicate the model in other MTs or public school settings.

**Keywords:** Classroom action research; content and language integrated learning; English speaking ability; integrated instruction; student engagement.

### INTRODUCTION

The demand for competent English speakers in a globalized era has driven innovation in language instruction, including in Islamic junior high schools (MTs) in Indonesia. One promising approach is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which combines subject matter learning with language acquisition to promote dual-focused outcomes. CLIL offers contextualized, meaningful exposure to the target language through content-based instruction, leading to deeper cognitive engagement and improved language proficiency, especially in speaking (Achugar & Tardio, 2023; Bonner et al.,

2023; Fazzi & Menegale, 2023; Hemmi & Banegas, 2021; Banegas & Zappa-Hollman, 2023). However, in Indonesia's MTs, traditional grammar-based methods still dominate, often isolating English from authentic content. The CLIL model, therefore, presents a strategic pedagogical innovation to enhance English speaking skills while simultaneously delivering subject knowledge.

CLIL has shown significant positive effects on learners' communicative competence, particularly speaking skills. Heras and Lasagabaster (2015) found that students in CLIL settings developed greater oral fluency and confidence. Similarly,



Garzón-Díaz (2021) documented improved speaking through environmental science projects in English. Banegas (2019) emphasized increased learner motivation and participation in CLIL environments. In virtual contexts, Bonner et al. (2023) illustrated how immersive environments enhanced spontaneous verbal interactions. Mac Gearailt et al. (2023) noted that the alignment of content and language fosters meaningful communication, a core benefit of CLIL in language learning.

Research has also highlighted the role of teacher development in successful CLIL implementation. Adipat (2021) noted that technology-supported T-CLIL enhanced teachers' TPACK and speaking-focused instruction. He and Lin (2018) advocated for dialogic teacher development to integrate language awareness in content teaching. Lopriore (2020) and Morton (2018) stressed the need for pedagogical shifts and training to support speaking-oriented CLIL classrooms. Pérez Cañado (2023) and Goris (2023) affirmed that without robust training and reflective practices, CLIL may fail to foster productive language skills like speaking.

The use of ICT tools in CLIL enhances speaking practice through collaborative and multimodal learning. Martínez-Soto and Prendes-Espinosa (2023) found that digital CLIL tasks increased learner talk time. O'Dowd (2018) observed that online exchanges encouraged spontaneous and authentic speaking. Nazira (2023) proposed video projects as CLIL techniques to practice oral language. Adipat (2021) similarly showed that digital CLIL increased verbal interactions among learners. These studies suggest that tech-enhanced CLIL can address speaking fluency and motivation.

Attitudes and motivation are central to language learning, and CLIL often enhances both. De Smet et al. (2023) linked CLIL to improved attitudes toward English and increased willingness to communicate. Ikeda (2019) contrasted CLIL with PPP approaches and emphasized the role of motivation in oral proficiency. Karabassova and Oralbayeva (2023) highlighted CLIL materials as engaging and communicative. Mehisto et al. (2023) demonstrated that trilingual CLIL in Kazakhstan fostered speaking across languages. These findings suggest that CLIL helps students value and practice English speaking more.

However, contextual factors influence CLIL success. Azparren-Legarre and Bueno-Alastuey (2022) identified institutional constraints that hindered speaking-focused instruction. Bauer-

Marschallinger et al. (2023) reported varied pedagogical practices limiting output. Kao (2022) documented teacher struggles with time and curriculum integration in speaking tasks. Madrid and Perez Canado (2018) highlighted the tension between standardized assessments and communicative language goals. Kling et al. (2023) stressed that policy support is crucial for spoken interaction within CLIL to flourish.

Theories around translanguaging and intercultural learning within CLIL contexts provide new avenues to support speaking skills. Karabassova and San Isidro (2023) found that allowing multiple languages encouraged verbal risk-taking. Setyaningrum and Sabilah (2023) explored intercultural dialogues in CLIL science classes in Indonesia, resulting in increased oral participation. Porto (2023) advocated intercultural citizenship through CLIL, which entails speaking and interaction. Gaballo (2023) argued that translation can scaffold speaking development. These approaches frame speaking as interactional and socio-culturally embedded.

Curriculum development studies show that CLIL-aligned syllabi emphasize interaction and production. Banegas and Zappa-Hollman (2023) curated examples of speaking-focused CLIL units. Karabassova and Oralbayeva (2023) designed materials that required frequent oral exchanges. Tarrayo and Hernandez (2023) explored secondary-level tasks that emphasized speaking over writing. Achugar and Tardio (2023) demonstrated that genre-based CLIL promoted oral academic discourse. Pavon Vazquez (2018) advocated content-specific literacies that included spoken language skills.

In student-centered approaches, CLIL aligns with inquiry and action-based methods to improve speaking. Mertler (2020) emphasized action research as a path to refine speaking-oriented CLIL pedagogy. Pun et al. (2023) critiqued science EMI classes for lacking interactive oral scaffolds, urging more dialogic designs. Zhu et al. (2023) revealed shifts in teacher beliefs after co-teaching speaking-focused CLIL units. Siqueira et al. (2018) pointed to South American challenges in speaking assessments under CLIL. Yuan (2023) suggested that language specialists can coach speaking strategies within EMI/CLIL classrooms.

Lastly, primary and secondary settings have adopted CLIL to develop speaking from early ages. Fazzi and Menegale (2023) detailed oral tasks for primary learners. Salvador-Garcia et al. (2023) applied CLIL in physical education to foster talk-in-action. Putra (2023) used quiz-based oral recall



to develop speaking in Indonesian classrooms. Tarrayo and Hernandez (2023) emphasized speaking as central to secondary CLIL. This cumulative research signals a growing consensus: CLIL is an effective and adaptable approach to improve spoken English skills across contexts.

Despite the global momentum of CLIL, few studies have explored its implementation in Islamic junior high schools (MTs) in Indonesia, particularly regarding its specific influence on speaking skills in real classroom settings. Existing research often focuses on general language improvement or university contexts, leaving a significant gap in evaluating CLIL's classroom-based speaking development among young adolescents in religious school settings (Azparren-Legarre & Bueno-Alastuey, 2022; Setyaningrum & Sabilah, 2023; Bonner et al., 2023; Tarrayo & Hernandez, 2023; Mehisto et al., 2023).

How does the implementation of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach affect the English speaking skills of MTs students in Indonesia?

This study is among the first to investigate the application of the CLIL approach in the context of Indonesian MTs students, particularly focusing on oral language development. It integrates intercultural perspectives, translanguaging strategies, and genre-based speaking activities tailored to religious and scientific content—an innovative blend not commonly found in previous CLIL studies (Porto, 2023; Karabassova & San Isidro, 2023; Achugar & Tardio, 2023; Garzón-Díaz, 2021; Fazzi & Menegale, 2023).

The study provides practical and theoretical contributions: (1) offering a model of CLIL integration for speaking in MTs settings; (2) informing teacher training and curriculum design to support oral skills through content integration; and (3) enriching CLIL scholarship with context-specific data from Southeast Asia. This research may inform policy-making for bilingual and religious-based education while promoting student engagement and oral fluency through content-rich instruction (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021; Pérez Cañado, 2023; Kling et al., 2023; Banegas & Zappa-Hollman, 2023; Yuan, 2023).

## METHOD

This study applied a Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology to investigate and improve the English-speaking skills of 7th-grade students at MTsN 2 Kuningan through the implementation of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, specifically using Content-

Based Instruction (CBI). The research followed the four-stage cycle proposed by Mertler (2020): Planning, Action, Development, and Reflection. The researchers, who were also the classroom teachers, collaborated with a partner teacher to design, implement, and evaluate instructional strategies over one semester, from July to November 2023. A total of 32 students participated in this study, which included 12 structured sessions.

In the planning stage, the researchers identified the core problem—students' low speaking proficiency—and selected CLIL as a pedagogical solution that integrates language learning with content engagement. English was used as a Medium of Interaction (EMI) to immerse students in both linguistic and subject-based discourse. Considerations at this stage included the lack of students' prior exposure to structured English instruction, the necessity for motivating and joyful learning environments, and the ethical and institutional constraints such as class time, resource availability, and school policies. Lesson objectives were based on the national curriculum and the English for Nusantara textbook, which includes themes such as "About Me," "My School," and "Culinary and Me." Instructional design incorporated communicative goals such as vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, confidence building, and fluency development. The planning also integrated insights from Fazzi and Menegale (2023), who emphasized playful strategies in CLIL, and Achugar and Tardio (2023), who advocated genre-based content for improving student engagement and speaking.

In the action stage, the CLIL intervention was implemented through three instructional cycles, each including a set of lessons and a performance test. Instructional delivery emphasized English as the language of communication and included repetition, pronunciation drills, dialogues, number games, and role plays. Two types of data were collected: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data were derived from pre-tests and speaking assessments administered after each cycle. The speaking rubric focused on vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and self-confidence, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns of student progress. Qualitative data included observations, teacher field notes, interviews with students, and classroom reflections. These provided insight into student engagement, classroom dynamics, and learners' attitudes toward CLIL.



During the development stage, the instructional strategy was continuously refined based on the results and reflections from previous cycles. This stage involved collaborative planning with the partner teacher to enhance student interaction and oral production through more engaging, authentic, and content-rich tasks. Instructional materials were supplemented with digital resources and visuals to scaffold learning. Genre-based speaking activities, such as short dialogues and Q&A sessions, were aligned with thematic units. The researchers also evaluated external and internal constraints that influenced the effectiveness of CLIL, including institutional limitations and learner anxiety. Drawing on studies by Azparren-Legarre and Bueno-Alastuey (2022), as well as Bauer-Marschallinger et al. (2023), the research addressed pedagogical flexibility, learner cognitive readiness, and the need for reflective, adaptive instruction.

Finally, in the reflection stage, the researchers analyzed student outcomes and instructional performance to inform the next cycle of implementation. Reflections were guided by classroom observations, journal entries, and teacher discussions. Feedback from students also played a role in refining the instruction. This stage allowed the researchers to assess the overall impact of CLIL on students' speaking development and to draw conclusions regarding effective strategies and areas for improvement. The reflective process ensured continuous enhancement of pedagogical practice and contributed to broader understanding

of CLIL implementation in an Islamic junior high school setting.

Throughout the research, ethical considerations were carefully upheld. Parental and institutional permissions were obtained, and all participant data were treated with confidentiality. This research aimed not only to improve students' English speaking skills but also to contribute context-specific insights into the implementation of CLIL in Indonesian MTs schools.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the CLIL approach in this study was carried out over three action cycles, each including a set of treatments, classroom observations, and speaking performance assessments. The results demonstrate a consistent improvement in students' English-speaking skills in the areas of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence.

In the pre-cycle test, all 32 students exhibited basic speaking proficiency. Each student scored an average of 4 out of a maximum of 12 points, with minimal variation. Most struggled with vocabulary recall and fluent expression, which aligns with Banegas (2019), who noted that students in traditional EFL settings often show low oral proficiency due to limited authentic use of language. The low baseline confirmed the need for an engaging, integrated instructional approach like CLIL.

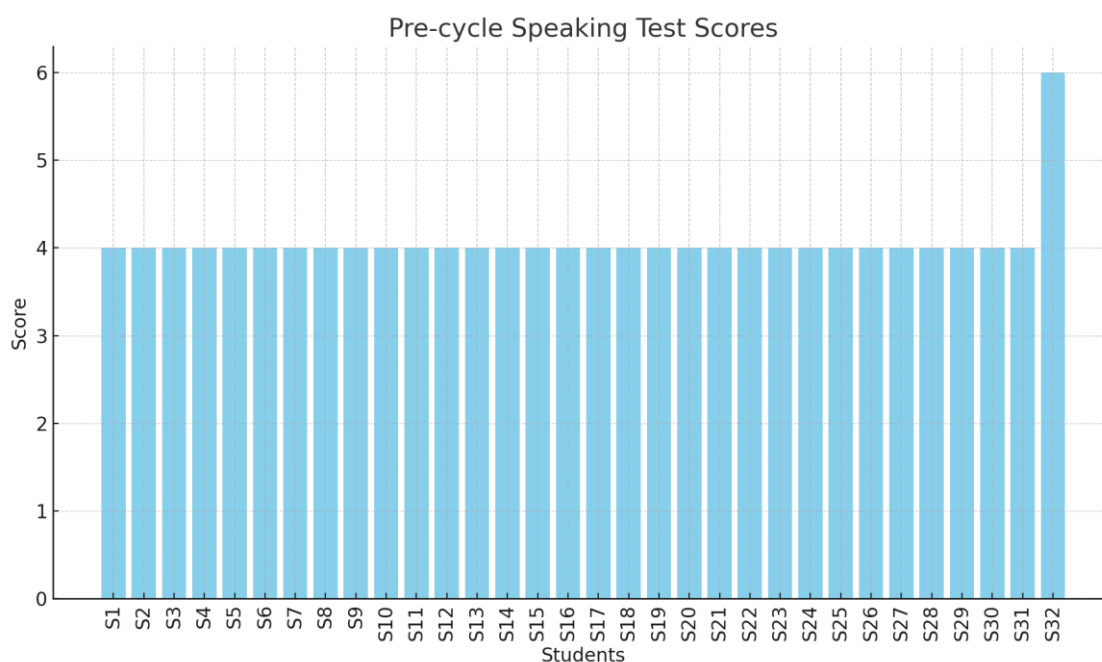


Figure 1. *Pre-cycle speaking test scores*



The pre-test was conducted to assess the students' baseline ability in speaking English. Each student was individually asked to perform short speaking tasks aimed at evaluating core components such as vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence. The results revealed that nearly all students were at a basic proficiency level, indicating limited exposure to structured English speaking opportunities during their previous schooling. Notably, one student—initialed ZRA—demonstrated comparatively stronger performance in vocabulary use and self-confidence.

These initial findings are consistent with previous CLIL-related studies emphasizing the challenges faced by learners in early stages of integrated content-language instruction. For instance, Fazzi and Menegale (2023) highlighted that young learners in primary settings often exhibit uneven development in language skills, especially when first exposed to CLIL environments. Similarly, Banegas (2019) underscored the role of motivation and affective engagement in language performance, noting that differences in confidence and vocabulary retention often appear in the early stages of CLIL-based instruction. Furthermore, Achugar and Tardio (2023) documented how genre-based CLIL activities can expose individual learner variations, particularly in content-specific language use and oral communication, which may explain ZRA's relative strengths.

### Cycle 1: Planning and implementation

In the first planning phase, the teacher and researcher collaboratively established clear instructional objectives focused on improving students' English speaking abilities. These objectives were derived from the *English for Nusantara* curriculum, emphasizing four core components: vocabulary, pronunciation, self-confidence, and fluency. The selected learning themes included "About Me," "Culinary and Me," "Home Sweet Home," "My School Activities," and "This is My School." For this cycle, lesson plans were developed around the theme "About Me" using the Content-Based Instruction (CBI) model within the CLIL framework.

During the implementation stage, the teacher initiated classroom interaction with a warm greeting to build rapport and set a positive tone: "Good morning class, how are you this morning?" to which the students responded enthusiastically. The initial lesson focused on the correct pronunciation of the English alphabet and numbers, aligned with the *English for Nusantara* material. The teacher modeled the pronunciation (e.g., A [ei], B [bi], C [si], etc.), and students repeated after her, engaging in choral repetition. Similarly, they practiced numbers from 1 to 100 through guided oral drills. This activity aimed to strengthen students' phonological awareness and boost their speaking confidence through structured repetition and oral practice.

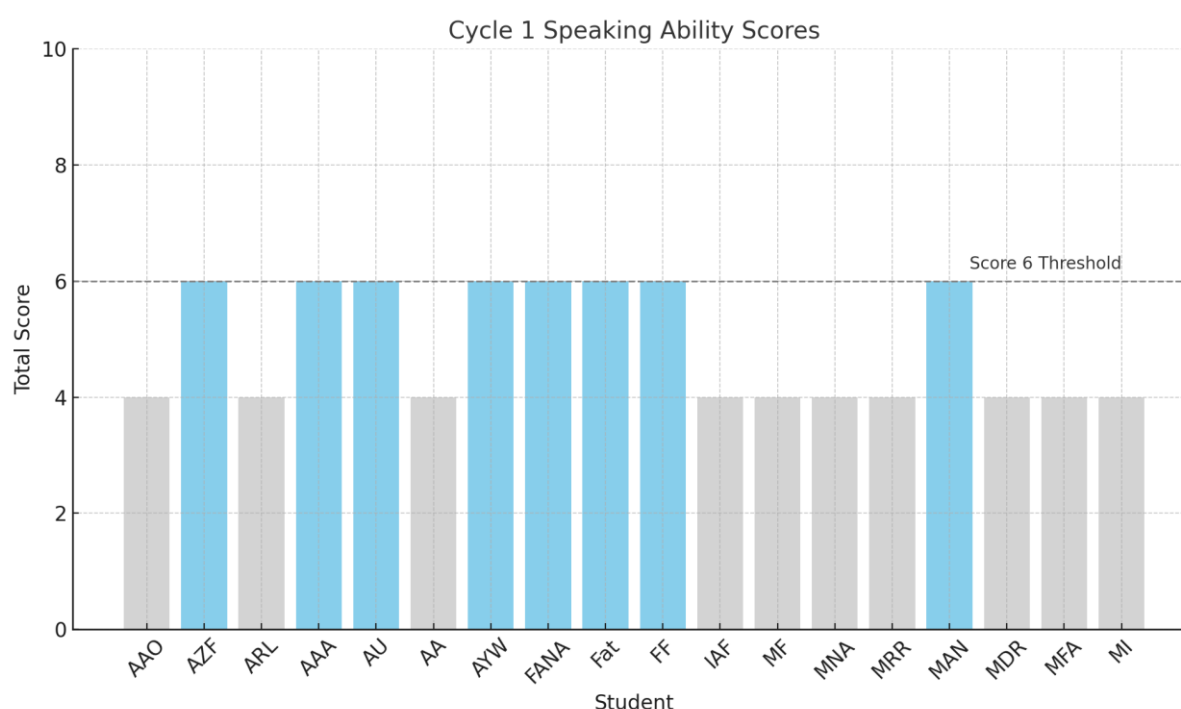


Figure 2. Cycle 1 speaking ability scores



Some students showed notable improvement with scores  $\geq 6$ , while the majority remained at the basic level (score 4). This highlights the need for continued intervention in the subsequent cycles. In the first cycle test, there was an improvement but not significant change. There were 12 (37,5%) students had improved their vocabularies and self-confident.

In the reflection stage of Cycle 1, the implementation of the CLIL approach revealed both strengths and areas needing improvement. The integration of CLIL using materials from the *English for Nusantara* textbook provided a structured foundation and introduced students to meaningful English language use. However, the observed student performance showed limited progress, particularly in vocabulary development. Although some learners demonstrated increased confidence and engagement during classroom interactions, the overall vocabulary scores remained relatively low. This suggests that the vocabulary teaching strategies employed were insufficiently impactful for beginner-level students. Based on classroom observations and informal student feedback, it became evident that the activities lacked sufficient contextual and visual support to help students retain and apply new vocabulary effectively. As a result, the research team decided to revise and enrich the lesson plans for the next cycle by incorporating more interactive methods, such as multimedia content, contextual visuals, and vocabulary games, to foster better comprehension and retention of vocabulary while maintaining the CLIL framework.

### *Cycle 2: Refinement and adjustment*

In the planning phase of Cycle 2, the researchers revised the lesson plans and instructional strategies based on the reflections and findings from Cycle 1. The primary focus was on enhancing student engagement and comprehension by introducing more diverse and interactive learning methods. Recognizing the challenges students faced in the previous cycle, the researchers refined the integration of content and language by supplementing the original materials from the *English for Nusantara* textbook with additional resources. These included visual media and contextual learning aids aimed at improving vocabulary acquisition and overall participation.

During the action phase, the researchers began each session with an engaging classroom routine to encourage student involvement. For instance, they opened with greetings and simple English conversations, followed by visual prompts such as number flashcards to reinforce previous lessons. These visual aids addressed specific areas where students had struggled, such as recognizing and pronouncing numbers. To further support learning, the researchers also incorporated content from other educational books and online resources, enriching the lesson content and providing varied exposure to the language. These adjustments aimed to create a more supportive and stimulating environment for developing speaking skills within the CLIL framework.

### *The second cycle test result*

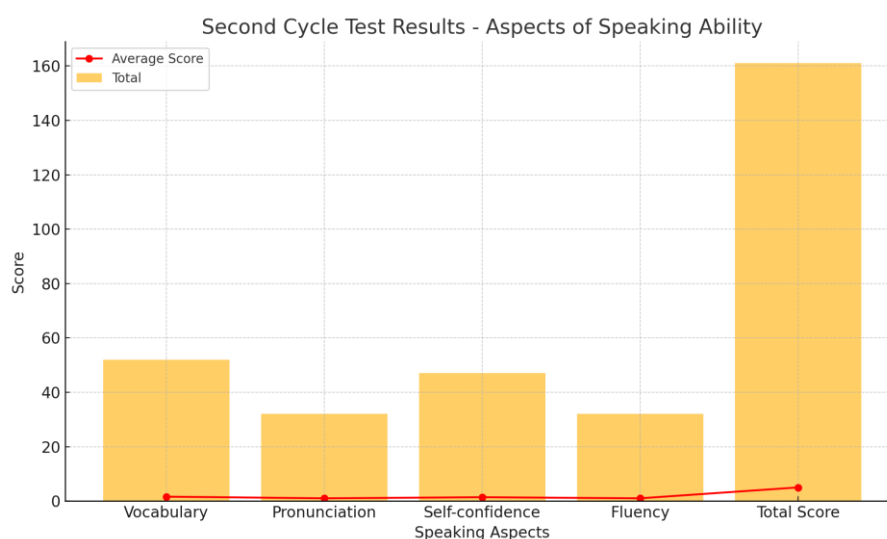


Figure 3. *Second cycle test results (aspects of speaking ability)*

The results of the second cycle test English-speaking skills, particularly in the areas of demonstrated a notable improvement in students' vocabulary and self-confidence. Out of 32



students, 20 (62.5%) achieved scores categorized as "developed," while the remaining 12 students (37.5%) remained at the "basic" level. The overall average score increased to 5.0 from the previous cycle, indicating steady progress in learners' performance.

When analyzed by component, vocabulary showed the highest improvement with an average score of 1.6 out of a maximum of 2. This suggests that the students were becoming more familiar with and confident in using English words during classroom activities. Similarly, self-confidence also improved with an average score of 1.4, reflecting the effectiveness of the adjusted teaching strategies in creating a more supportive and engaging classroom environment.

However, pronunciation and fluency did not show significant progress. The average scores for both remained at 1.0, the same as in the first cycle. This indicates that while students may be gaining vocabulary and feeling more confident, their ability to pronounce words accurately and speak fluently is still limited. These aspects likely require more focused attention in subsequent cycles through structured pronunciation practice and fluency-building activities.

The second cycle showed that refinements to the lesson plans and teaching strategies—such as incorporating media, varied materials, and interactive practice—positively influenced student learning outcomes. Nonetheless, to further enhance overall speaking competence, future instructional efforts should prioritize pronunciation and fluency development. These areas remain key challenges that must be addressed to ensure balanced growth in all dimensions of speaking ability.

Researchers reflected on the effectiveness of refinements made during the second cycle,

analyzed whether adjustments positively influenced English speaking skills, and identified further areas for refinement or reinforcement.

#### *Cycle 3: Consolidation and evaluation*

In the planning phase of the third cycle, the researchers analyzed the overall progress made during the first and second cycles. Based on the outcomes and feedback collected, they revised and consolidated their instructional design to further optimize the application of the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach. The refinement focused on reinforcing the strategies that had been effective in improving students' speaking skills, while also developing targeted solutions to address the persistent issues that limited progress in areas such as pronunciation and fluency.

During the action phase, the optimized CLIL strategy was implemented with an emphasis on student-centered learning. The activities were designed to foster greater collaboration, critical thinking, and verbal interaction among students. One such activity included peer-to-peer speaking practice in which students engaged in basic conversational exchanges. For example, Student 1 might greet their partner with, "Hi, how are you?" to which Student 2 would respond, "Hi, I am fine, and you?" These dialogues were followed by vocabulary reinforcement such as, "How do you say 79 in English?" prompting real-time language processing. By having students practice directly with one another in context-based interactions, the researchers aimed to build not only linguistic knowledge but also speaking confidence and fluency.

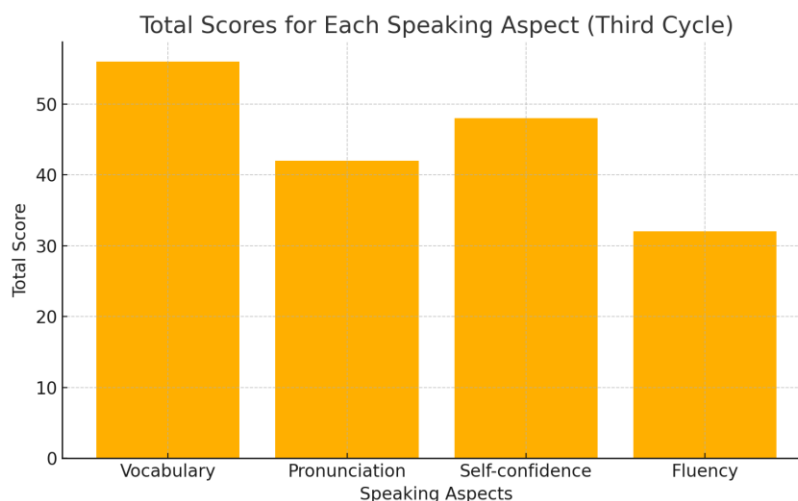


Figure 4. Total scores for each speaking aspect (third cycle)



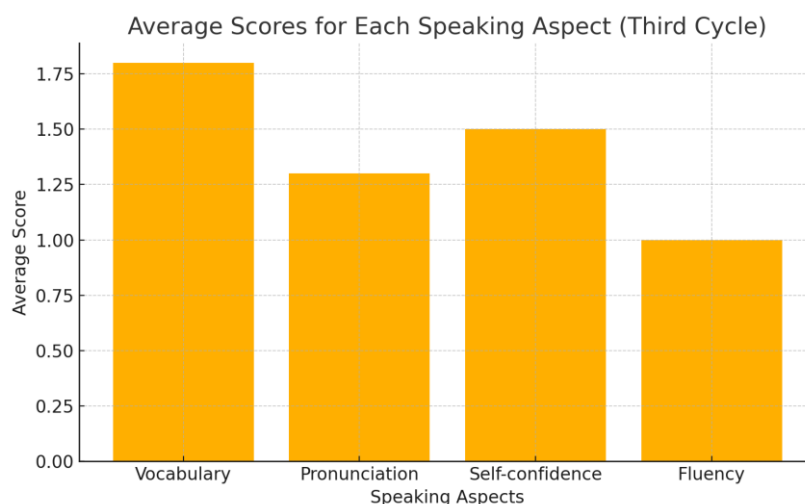


Figure 5. *Average scores for each speaking aspect (third cycle)*

In the final phase of the classroom action research, the researchers administered a concluding round of speaking ability assessments to evaluate the cumulative improvement of students' performance after three cycles of intervention using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach. These tests were complemented by in-depth classroom observations, enabling researchers to holistically assess how students engaged with the CLIL-based learning environment, especially in terms of participation, confidence, and communicative competence. The data gathered indicated that most students demonstrated consistent improvement across key aspects of speaking ability: vocabulary use, pronunciation accuracy, self-confidence, and fluency.

During the reflection stage, the researchers critically analyzed the effectiveness of the refined and consolidated CLIL strategies. They found that the integration of interactive tasks, visual media, and partner-based speaking activities contributed significantly to students' motivation and progress, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and self-expression. Moreover, the gradual increase in average scores across the three cycles illustrated that the iterative approach—emphasizing continuous refinement—was essential to adapt to students' needs and challenges.

Overall, the CLIL approach proved to be a meaningful and impactful method for developing English speaking skills among seventh-grade learners. Key lessons learned include the importance of scaffolding, active engagement, and contextualized content in language instruction. While fluency remained the most challenging aspect for several students, the research affirmed that CLIL, when implemented with sustained

reflection and adaptation, can effectively enhance early-stage language learners' communicative abilities.

## CONCLUSION

This classroom action research concluded that the implementation of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach significantly improved the English speaking abilities of seventh-grade students at MTsN 2 Kuningan. Through three iterative cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection, students showed measurable progress in vocabulary, pronunciation, self-confidence, and fluency. The average speaking scores increased in each cycle—from 4.0 in the pre-cycle to 5.0 in Cycle 2, and 5.5 in Cycle 3—demonstrating the positive cumulative impact of the CLIL strategy.

The research highlighted that contextual and interactive content, when integrated with targeted language instruction, enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes. Challenges such as limited fluency and pronunciation accuracy were gradually addressed through reflective refinement of lesson plans and teaching strategies. Additionally, students' active participation and confidence in speaking English improved as they were consistently exposed to meaningful communication tasks.

In summary, the CLIL approach is an effective pedagogical method for enhancing speaking skills in young learners, particularly when implemented through structured, reflective classroom action research. It not only supports language development but also fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and learner motivation. Future research could explore longer-term impacts and



apply similar approaches to other language skills such as writing or listening.

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