

# TED Talks in EFL Context: An Alternative Way for Teaching and Improving Students' Speaking Skills

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## ABSTRACT

The technological advancement has made the media rapidly grow, particularly as a learning media. Teachers and educators today are required to be creative, innovative and updated in finding and using media as a learning tool in class. It can't be avoided anymore the use of technology in millennium era has become a necessity for teachers in EFL teaching. This study aims to discuss how a video-based conference video channel known as TED Talks can be useful in improving students' speaking skills. The methodology used qualitative research and data collection obtained from relevant paper-based articles that have studied TED Talks as a learning medium to improve speaking skills. The results of this discussion paper showed that TED Talks has an effect on improving speaking among the EFL and also as a motivation for teachers and students to always keep spirit, inspirational and insightful. The novel finding of this study is that TED Talks also changes the students' perspectives for the better, as they see that people from any country and ethnicity can speak English confidently in public.

## 1. Introduction

In this technological era of education, English is more than just an international language, and speaking skills are recognized as the most important skills to be mastered by students, because their main purpose is to communicate. Of the four language skills, improving and mastering one's speaking skills occupy the top investments of people worldwide. Through speaking, people can part the messages that they want to convey and get the information or action that they need from others. The ability to speak a foreign language is seen as an important form of characteristic for good learners in any background (Hamuddin, Syahdan, Rahman, Rianita, & Derin, 2019). In addition, Demirel (2012) stated that the most commonly used language in the world is English. Although there are other international languages that have many if more speakers, English remains the dominant language as it is not only the go-to language for people with different languages, more than half of the content in the cyberspace is made in English as well (Junaidi, Hamuddin, Julita, Rahman, & Derin, 2020). Even today, the presence of English as an international language already has a very influential role in many aspects, especially education.

Although speaking skills are classified as crucial, teaching English speaking skills in the EFL context has always been a challenging task for teachers considering that English here is a foreign language, which in short, is rarely or even not used in daily communication, especially by countries that are not considered English as their official language. Despite its status as a foreign, English is

predominantly used in official and formal learning situations, whether for practical purposes such as speeches or theoretical purposes such as analyses (Yudar, Gowasa, & Nursafira, 2019). It is why teachers are required to constantly seek out and implement teaching strategies to overcome problems regarding skills in the classroom (Ro, 2019; Susilo, 2019). In the same situation, EFL students also need constant practice to improve oral expression and language skills.

The improvement of speaking skill for students is influenced by some factors. These factors can influence how successful students can demonstrate their speaking skills over time. Not infrequently, their success in learning a language is usually judged by their performance of speaking, even in private or public place. (Gistituati, Refnaldi, & Syaifullah, 2018). The first factor is vocabulary mastery. Lack of vocabulary along with the inability to pick up the tone and intonation puts a big difficulty to the non-native speaker (Hamad, Metwally, & Alfaruque, 2019). For some students who live in countries where English is not their first language, they do not find native speakers around them who at least help them in gaining new vocabulary, as well as learning by themselves or in learning centers or schools.

The second is anxiety (Derin & Hamuddin, 2019). Al-Sobhi & Preece (2018) stated that anxiety and fear affect the progress in speaking for the target language. Students find it difficult to control themselves when dealing with people when speaking. Anandari (2015) assumed that the main reason for the emergence of anxiety arises because anxiety itself is a complex matter which involved

psychological conditions of the learners. This is what makes speaking skills feared by many students, especially for those who have less self-confidence so that it affects the ability to speak English.

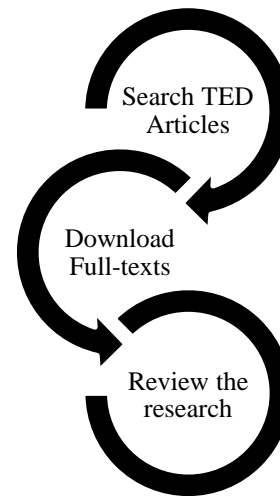
Besides these two factors, technology also plays a role in influencing students' speaking skills. Technology is considered as a powerful tool that can perform teaching and learning (Gómez, 2019). As educators, teachers play an important role in improving the quality of a student's speech in class. Therefore, the teacher as a facilitator must know the ways of finding innovations or ways to overcome problems that often occur in increasing students' speaking skills in school.

One of them is video-based learning based on TED Talks as a learning medium. TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, is a non-profit media organization that uploads free and online presentations. TED Talks is a video based conference where speakers present their big ideas, well formed in under 18 minutes. Till now, TED Talks has had many topics such as science, business, global issues, and education as well. That is why TED Talks is now widely known and their videos are translated into many languages. Inevitably, teachers can apply TED Talks as a medium for teaching English in class Gheorghiu, Callan, & Skylark (2019).

From seeing this phenomenon, the author aims to discuss how TED Talks can be an alternative medium to improve students' speaking skills and can reduce the factors that can prevent a student from speaking English.

**2. Method**

The research design of this study is descriptive qualitative. The method of data collection is by reviewing the relevant research literature which discussed TED Talks as a teaching tool to improve speaking among EFL students. The flow of this descriptive qualitative research can be seen in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Research Method

The researcher obtained the papers from Scopus-indexed journals, searching them directly from the Scopus Journal website. The researcher selected these papers based on data derived from studies over the last five years. Moreover, the researcher also seeks relevant articles from international journals to obtain accurate data and conclusions, and prove TED Talks can be a learning medium for EFL Students which is expected to be implemented for EFL students, especially in countries where English is learned as a foreign language.

By reading the titles and articles, the researcher could see whether these articles truly focus on researching the application of TED Talks for teaching rather than merely mentioning it in their article. Then, the researcher collected the relevant articles by downloading the full-texts. These will be the results and the main sources of the researcher's discussion on the usefulness of TED Talks. The researcher notes, however, that this study's limitation is that this review of literature is not conducted systematically, but also stresses that the articles are all peer-reviewed papers, without any pre-prints included.

**3. Results & Discussion**

In this millennial era, as educators, teachers are appointed as a facilitator for teaching skills to help students improve their ability to speak English. Before they can speak, the students need to master listening skills first to obtain new vocabulary and how to pronounce a word, because to improve listening skill, the effective of the use materials in learning English is very essential in teaching process (Fahmiansyah & Abdulrahman, 2018). The techniques and methods provided were various, but not all of them were successfully implemented. As we have seen, there are many EFL students who have not been able to master vocabulary so that they have difficulty in expressing or providing information.

However, not a few teachers out there still have limitations in finding new ways that become alternative learning in speaking classes. Sirisrimangkorn (2018) stated that some students may seem difficult to express their feelings or thoughts efficiently. One crucial reason might be due to lack of opportunities to use English language in authentic communicative ways. Therefore, there is a need for the role of teachers and schools to overcome one of the numerous problems students faced. Because when teachers take great care to prepare speaking class materials, students will get involved in the learning process (Qutob, 2018). He also mentioned, it is the responsibilities of language teachers to select appropriate materials for speaking classes, especially in countries where only their official language is spoken.

Therefore, TED Talks is existing in the midst of technological advancements, especially in the field of education. Where teachers provide the latest innovations to facilitate students to be able to speak English properly and appropriately. TED Talks prove to be useful for English teaching as foreign languages considering that they catch students' attention and get them related to the actual context (María et al., 2018), because TED Talks offers speakers from various parts of the world, and with interesting topics, insightful sometimes it is humorous and inspires people who are watching it. TED Talks also makes it easier for people to access it, because TED Talks is based in the internet world and can be accessed through a video application called YouTube. YouTube is considered a source of online material that can play a key role in teaching and learning, as a medium for teachers for teaching in the class (Almurashi, 2016).

One form of multimedia is the use of the video, where there are various benefits of using video as a pedagogical tool (Seow & Pan, 2018). In 2015, Chinese researcher Yingxia Li and colleagues conducted a study of students in the Public Speaking in EFL Teaching course (Li et al., 2016). With a total of 150 students from five majoring classes in Software Engineering at Dalian University of Technology, the results showed that TED Talks has worked effectively in improving students' language learning. It is concerned about the effectiveness and motivation of language input. As expected by the researchers, the students are willing to explore the topic provided and choose the one they are interested in, without having to be instructed by their teacher first. This proves students already have the initiative and will.

Additionally, most students don't just watch one video before finally deciding to choose what they like. What's more, the results shown are motivations that arise in them. The students admitted agreeing to prefer imitating the speaker's intonation and pronunciation in the video and how to use words and sentences to compose their speeches. The vocabulary obtained also increased while students watched the video. Also their courage to speak in public also proved positive (Kedrowicz & Taylor, 2016). In short, TED Talks

works successfully in motivating students both in language learners and a better public speaker.

In the past decade, the advancement of technology and online service has been remarkable, and language education has benefited from this development (Hashimoto, Fukuda & Okazaki, 2015). From a study in 2018 conducted by researchers, María et al. (2018) from Colombia showed that there were positive responses from students who were used as samples of their research. In terms of student participation, TED Talks that contains a variety of content such as culture, social and politics, makes students want to be encouraged to speak (Takaesu, 2013). Students can also take advantage of the speaker's experience, a kind of assumption with what they believe about a particular topic. If in a debate, they can defend their position using the expressions they get from the speech they watch on TED Talks.

Furthermore, students feel motivated to participate in English classes. Many TED Talks addresses what motivates people, prompting the questions of how teachers can inspire students to want to learn (DaVia Rubenstein, 2012). Considering they use TED Talks as a new medium in classroom learning, this actually steals their attention. In her research, María et al. (2018) also mentioned that students expressed that they felt more comfortable doing the activities proposed thanks to the talks since they were offered the possibility to gather words that are normally used in spoken languages, easy to use based on context, and related to their life, since they were the ones who chose the topic. The students also think the themes discussed at TED Talks are relevant to social and cultural aspects.

In addition, TED Talks also increases students' self-confidence since they have counted with the elements that allowed them to express their ideas, their feelings and, their perspective on socio-cultural topics. In addition, the fact that TED Talks speakers come from various countries lets the students realize that learning English is not only perfect pronunciation, but also includes how to use language to communicate, no matter whether it's true or not. She also added, because actually perfection will come if you keep practicing. Therefore, TED Talks is one of the ICT tools that can be effectively used to promote speaking skills. It represents an effective instructional tool for developing language skills due to its authentic nature (Salem, 2019).

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the discussion above it can be concluded that TED Talks can be a useful tool to improve the speaking skills of EFL students. Although TED Talks as a video based learning is still relatively new, the responses obtained from EFL students show a positive response.

What is interesting is that TED Talks also presents a consistent display that gives a powerful message to any students who learn English as their foreign languages. In such an internationally recognised stage, the speakers of TED Talks can come from any background. The speakers

who share their ideas on stage can be from any country and any ethnicity, and they speak very well in a language that is not their native tongue. Using TED Talks as a material in classrooms can indirectly change the perspectives and boosts the students' self-esteem as budding EFL speakers. This effect may be more powerful if teachers also prepare to use TED Talks sessions by speakers who are from the same country or ethnicity as the students. With such a vivid evidence of how far they can go, students may be more encouraged to not be afraid to speak in front of the class, and soon, the public.

As a result, TED Talks can be recommended as a learning medium in countries which English as a foreign language, especially Indonesia in the hope that the teacher can give the best facilitation to the students so they can be more effective in learning and speaking English, also as an useful tool to motivate students and release their anxiety as they speak in front of the audience or public place. The significance of this study's results is limited by the general method of literature review. Future studies would drive the significance of literature findings if the review is more systematic and robust in its selection.

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