

## Exploring Students' Target and Learning Needs in Developing English Speaking Skills: A Study at MTs Miftahul Lubab Ngawi

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the students' goals and learning needs for improving their English-speaking skills in the Conversation Program at MTs Miftahul Lubab Ngawi. Using a descriptive mixed-method design, we gathered data through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations involving 64 students and two English teachers. The findings revealed that students' target needs included four main aspects: goals, necessities, lacks, and wants. The students aimed to achieve fluency and confidence in communication. Their main weaknesses were vocabulary, pronunciation, and self-confidence. In terms of learning needs, students prefer interactive and collaborative activities supported by audiovisual materials. They also valued a relaxed classroom environment and wanted teachers to act as facilitators rather than traditional instructors. These results suggest that effective speaking instruction should include linguistic, psychological, and contextual factors to enhance communicative skills. Therefore, English teachers and material developers should create speaking materials based on these needs to improve motivation, engagement, and meaningful learning experiences for EFL learners.

### INTRODUCTION

English, in the increasingly global world we live in, is not merely a useful language for international business and diplomacy but has developed to be one of the most significant languages across higher education and information. Speaking is regarded as the most important and difficult skill to learn among the four language skills (Richards, 2008; Nunan, 2003). Learners, when they speak, express their thoughts, negotiate meaning and communicate with others in a real world. Oppositional, several English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have difficulties in making good speaking performance attributed to the small vocabulary knowledge, erroneous grammar and lack of self-confidence (Harmer, 2007; Brown, 2001). Very frequently, these obstacles prevent students from becoming fluent and communicating effectively (the point of learning a new language).

Speaking ability indicates the extent to which learners can use language to communicate, not their knowledge of grammar. Richards & Renandya (2002) claim that speaking is a multifaceted skill involving linguistic, sociolinguistic and strategic competence which must merge for communication to be successful. Though in Indonesian EFL classes deserves English for real communication but it is not enough. This results in students concentrating on grammar rather than

real language aides. (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Nunan, 2003; Sulistiyo, 2016). Consequently, the learners' apprehension in speaking leads to a considerable drop in motivation and reluctance to engage in communication (Astuti & Lammers, 2017; Dewi, 2020). This highlights the importance of determining students' needs in terms of enhancing their communicative speaking skills.

Need analysis helps teachers identify and appreciate learners' goals, preferences, and challenges and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have provided a foundational definition of needs analysis; this involves determining what learners must accomplish with the language and in what manner they prefer to engage in learning the language. As previously mentioned, Richards (2001) states that a well-thought-out and structured needs analysis serves to anchor the development of effective syllabi and materials that address the goals of learners. In addition, the emphasis made by Brown (1995) highlights the importance of relevance in the work and how it can be centered on learners through the provision of needs. Similarly, Nunan (2003) and Nation and Macalister (2010) identify the importance of needs analysis in ensuring curriculum alignment to the learners and the needs of communication they meet in their everyday lives.

In addition to needs analysis, CLT provides a teaching method which aims at enabling learners to practice English productively. The CLT is reared on real communication and students engage in interactive tasks such as discussions, role plays and information-gap activities (Littlewood, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2011). Savignon (2002) and Larsen-Freeman (2011) argue that CLT helps students develop the ability to speak fluently and accurately by focusing on students talking with others not on memorization. CLT, however, should be modified to a specific socio-cultural and institutional reality to work properly (Taridi et al 2023; Kadhim & Mohsein, 2024). CLT principles and the findings of a needs-analysis can be combined to produce effective learning materials with communication skills focus that are relevant to the context.

CLT, however, should be modified to a specific socio-cultural and institutional reality to work properly (Taridi et al 2023; Kadhim & Mohsein, 2024). CLT principles and the findings of a needs-analysis can be combined to produce effective learning materials with communication skills focus that are relevant to the context. Likewise, Putri and Ariyanti (2020) revealed that speaking materials involving real workplace communication made the vocational students more progressive. These studies reveal the importance of resources that meet learners' communicative orientations as well as their learning styles.

However, despite valuable work in these areas, little research has focused on the speaking requirement at Junior secondary Islamic schools. In such settings, exposure to English is limited and the possibility of interaction is minimal. Hayadi et al. (2025) investigated speech problems for senior high school students as well and found that there were significant difficulties with grammar and fluency most frequently, although interactive activities (discussions, games) were favoured. Nonetheless, little evidence has been gathered in relation to specific target needs and learning needs together with the application of Hingtgen Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework. Hence, relatively little is known about how speaking instruction can be drawn by learners' needs in these contexts (Rahman & Sari, 2023).

The research investigates student needs and learning requirements for the Conversation Program at MTs Miftahul Lubab Ngawi. The program enables students to enhance their English skills through communicative activities which take place outside their standard classroom schedule. The research uses Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework together with CLT principles to determine which speaking abilities students need improvement and their preferred learning

approaches. The research stands out because it investigates a junior secondary Islamic school environment to create CLT-based speaking materials which match student communication needs and learning preferences and classroom conditions.

## METHODS

The research design employed descriptive qualitative survey methods to determine which English-speaking abilities students need to learn and what they want to achieve. The research design combined quantitative descriptive data from questionnaires with qualitative data obtained through student interviews and classroom observations (Creswell, 2012; Gay, 2009; Gopal et al., 2021). The research aimed to understand students' learning requirements and their preferred learning approaches through their actual classroom experiences instead of testing theoretical predictions. The research functioned as the initial phase of R&D work which concentrated on conducting needs assessment to develop communicative speaking materials (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The research site was MTs Miftahul Lubab Ngawi which operates as an Islamic junior secondary school in East Java Indonesia. The research involved 64 students who participated in the Conversation Program which serves as an additional English-speaking development program. The researchers selected participants through purposive sampling because they demonstrated various English proficiency levels while actively engaging in speaking activities. The English teacher from the school participated as a supporting researcher to share knowledge about student performance and classroom activities and student learning behaviors. The research setting was appropriate because it demonstrated an EFL teaching environment which students experience through restricted English communication opportunities.

The research team used three data collection methods which included questionnaires and interviews and classroom observations. The research team developed the questionnaire through Hutchinson and Waters (1987) framework. The questionnaire contained two main sections which assessed students' target needs and their learning requirements for input and procedures and setting and roles. The questionnaire contained both quantitative and qualitative questions which enabled students to express their opinions through measurable responses and detailed explanations. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with students and the English teacher to validate and enhance the collected data. The speaking instruction interviews enabled participants to share their complete learning experiences and their expectations about speaking instruction. The researcher conducted classroom observations to study student participation and their reactions during speaking activities. The observed classroom activities helped validate the findings from questionnaires and interviews.

The three primary steps of Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, were used to analyze the data. The researcher categorized responses based on themes pertaining to the learning needs and target of the students during the data reduction process. For ease of comprehension, the data were then presented in tables and narratives. By analyzing data patterns considering Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) theoretical framework, the final conclusions were drawn. Data triangulation was employed to compare questionnaire, interview, and observation results to guarantee the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell, 2012).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's conclusions are based on two research questions concerning the learning requirements and target needs of students for English speaking abilities. We gathered data from 64 students participating in the Conversation Program at MTs Miftahul Lubab Ngawi through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Key codes like "fluency," "lack of confidence," "peer interaction," and "authentic learning" were found through a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. By providing additional information about students' experiences and attitudes toward learning, these codes deepened the quantitative findings. The detailed results are presented in the ensuing sections, which are then discussed in relation to earlier research and theoretical frameworks. According to recent opinions, needs analysis should consider a variety of factors, such as the language proficiency, emotions, and contexts of the learners (Long, 2005; Basturkmen, 2010). Furthermore, studies reveal that EFL students frequently have trouble speaking because of their nervousness, lack of experience, and lack of classroom interaction (Tuan & Mai, 2015; Derakhshan et al., 2016; Gilakjani, 2016).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Target Needs

The survey and interview revealed that the students have specific goals for improving their speaking abilities in English. Most students reported that their main goals are to speak fluently and confidently both academically and in daily life. Figure 1 shows that 68.7% of students want to be fluent in describing their ideas, summarizing, and discussing. One student mentioned during the interview, *"I want to speak English confidently, not just memorize sentences."* For them, English is a practical language and one that is required for a future life and to express themselves. This finding supports Richards (2008) and Nunan (2003), who pointed out that the main goals of language learning in EFL contexts are fluency and effective communication.

About their needs, the data revealed that students are aware that they must improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and basic grammar to speak fluently. In this respect, 64.1% mentioned that increasing their vocabulary is essential in making them articulate their ideas clearly, while 53.1% said that improving their pronunciation is urgent. A teacher pointed out during the interview, *"They can make sentences but often pause because of lack of appropriate words."* Such findings agree with what has been stressed by Harmer (2007) and Brown (2001) concerning the essential element in speaking skill development, namely, that language proficiency provides the foundation for speaking fluency. Likewise, in Tuan and Mai's (2015) study, it was found that vocabulary and pronunciation accuracy are two of the main factors influencing the speaking performance of EFL learners.

The results also revealed that many students are aware of their weaknesses, which shows the discrepancy between their current abilities and targets. The majority (59.4%) admitted feeling uncertain while speaking in English, which was often due to the fear of making mistakes and a lack of vocabulary. During the classroom observations, the students mostly kept silent unless initiated by the instructor; this has confirmed their reluctance toward initiating conversations. As one student mentioned, *"I'm afraid to speak because I'm not sure my pronunciation is correct."* Such findings corroborate the assertions of Richards & Renandya (2002) and Zarrinabadi & Tanbakooei (2016), who state that anxiety and willingness to communicate are significant affective factors in speaking.

In terms of learning preference, most students were interested in interactive and fun speaking activities: 56.2% of the respondents enjoyed role plays, 50% liked language games, while 48.4% preferred group discussions (see Figure 3). Students mentioned that these activities make learning more engaging and meaningful. A learner responded, *"When we play games or do role plays, I feel brave to talk in English."* Their preferences reflect some notions of Communicative Language Teaching, such as the use of real and student-centered interactions (Littlewood, 2007; Savignon, 2002).

Table 1. Summary of Students' Target Needs in Speaking

Aspect	Description	Percentage
Goal	Communicate fluently and confidently in real-life situations	68.7%
Necessities	Vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar mastery for effective communication	64.1%
Lacks	Limited vocabulary, low confidence, and pronunciation difficulty	59.4%
Wants	Interactive speaking tasks (role plays, games, discussions)	56.2%

Overall, results from the need analysis indicate that students have linguistic, psychological, and motivational needs. Their purposes, needs, lacks, and desires reflect that learners want to be fluent and confident communicators based on hands-on and social learning. Results confirm the claim by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) that good materials should respond to both objective and subjective learner needs. Moreover, the inclusion of students' voices through interviews and classroom observations shows that speaking motivation is also influenced greatly by emotional variables such as fear, enjoyment, and encouragement of classmates.

### Learning Needs

The results on the learning needs of students revealed that most learners preferred audiovisual and dialogue-based input in improving their speaking. The self-reporting questionnaire showed that 76.6% of the students enjoyed learning from videos, short dialogues, and songs with expressions like real-life conversations. One student mentioned, *"I like learning from videos because I can listen and see how people speak."* Similarly, 67.2% mentioned visual materials in helping them comprehend spoken language more easily. These results corroborate Nunan (2003) and Derakhshan et al. (2016), who attest that varied and authentic input leads to improved comprehension and retention, especially when learners use speaking materials based on multimedia.

Regarding procedures, most students prefer interactive classroom activities with a lively atmosphere over traditional drills. Accordingly, 57.8% of the students chose language games, 50% enjoyed group discussions, and 43.8% liked demonstration-based speaking tasks from the questionnaire. Students reported that the reason for enjoying them was that learning could be less stressful when working in a group. As one student indicated, *"When we speak in pairs, it is easier than talking alone in front of the class."* Such data supports the proposition by Littlewood (2007) and Savignon (2002) that communicative tasks enhance learner engagement along with developing fluency because learners experience less anxiety while using language meaningfully.

The learning settings data indicated that students were more at ease in an informal and supportive setting to practice speaking. Approximately 60.9% of students preferred relaxed classroom settings that allowed working together rather than strict, lecture-based classes. Classroom observation showed students were much more active when working in groups. The teacher also mentioned, *"When they are sitting in groups, they speak more naturally and help one*

another.” This result supports the claim made by Larsen-Freeman (2011) and Renandya and Widodo (2016) that supportive learning environments enhance the confidence and independence of the learners.

Regarding roles, the data demonstrated that both teaching and learning roles played important roles in the language learning process. About 73.4% of the students mentioned that teachers must be facilitators who guide and motivate them in learning. On the other hand, students consider themselves active participants and should take responsibility for their development. As expressed in the interview, the teacher himself emphasized, *“My role is to guide them, but they must practice more with friends to gain confidence.”* This aligns with the learner-centered philosophy of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2011; Rahimi & Fathi, 2021), which values independence, peer collaboration, and meaningful feedback.

Table 2. Summary of Students' Learning Needs

Aspect	Description	Percentage
Input	Audiovisual and dialogue-based materials (videos, songs, short conversations)	76.6%
Procedures	Interactive tasks (games, discussions, demonstrations)	57.8%
Setting	Relaxed, collaborative classroom environment	60.9%
Roles	Teacher as facilitator; students as active participants	73.4%

Overall, the findings indicate that students require interactive, multimodal, and collaborative approaches to learning. The addition of qualitative insights, such as students enjoying video and group learning, supports the data in a more comprehensive way by highlighting how real experiences define their preferences. Such findings confirm the idea of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Long (2005) that the learning needs include not only what students must learn but also how they like to learn. In this context, the inclusion of authentic materials, technology-based tasks, and peer collaboration can close the gap between theoretical learning and practical communication. Not only does such a strategy increase students' motivation, but it also creates a sense of ownership and relevance in the students' learning process, enabling them to use the language more naturally and confidently in realistic situations.

The results above offer valuable information about the goals and learning needs of students to help improve their skills in speaking English. The discussion below elaborates on the results through the theoretical framework of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Long (2005), and principles of CLT. It connects the experiences of the students in interviews and observations to the wider understanding of needs-based instruction in EFL classrooms. Situating these findings within both theoretical and practical standpoints, this section highlights how learners' voices can be used to build up more responsive and contextualized speaking materials. Further, it reflects on how combining quantitative and qualitative results deepens an understanding of learner-centered pedagogy by building a bridge between research evidence and class implementation.

### Target Needs

Students' goals indicated a strong desire for communicative fluency and self-confidence rather than grammatical perfection. This finding supports the shift of emphasis in modern EFL teaching that has emphasized language as a tool for genuine communication rather than accuracy alone (Richards, 2008; Nunan, 2003). The student statement, *“I want to speak English confidently, not just memorize sentences,”* aptly reflects how learners view English as a medium to assert their

identity and communicate their ideas. This is an important motivation. As Derakhshan et al. (2016) and Tuan and Mai (2015) argue, learners perform better when speaking practice is personally meaningful. Thus, knowing students' goals helps in creating instruction that develops confidence and fluency.

The data from the needs and gaps indicate that the problems related to language are closely connected with emotional barriers. In the words of one teacher, *"They can make sentences, but often stop because they don't know the right words."* This suggests that a lack of vocabulary combined with the fear of making mistakes holds them back from speaking spontaneously. This corroborates the assertion made by Brown (2001) and Harmer (2007) that psychological readiness must go hand in hand with language development. In the same vein, Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei (2016) mention that WTC will increase when the learners feel that they are ready both linguistically and emotionally. Therefore, speaking materials must aim at increasing students' confidence in using the language while decreasing the anxiety that inhibits participation in class.

Preferences for interactive learning environments also support communicative approaches. For example, statements such as *"When we play games or do role plays, I feel brave to talk in English"* indicate that pleasant learning experiences raise the willingness to speak. This finding corroborates Littlewood (2007), Savignon (2002), and Richards (2015), who unanimously claim that motivation is essential to sustaining communicative competence. Furthermore, according to Tomlinson (2011), emotional investment during the completion of tasks is equally important as cognitive engagement when materials are to be effectively designed. These views emphasize the following: interactive, enjoyable, and supportive speaking activities are at the heart of addressing learners' communicative needs.

In short, considerations on target needs suggest that effective speaking instruction should combine linguistic, affective and motivational dimensions. Learners need guided vocabulary and pronunciation support, but also the encouragement of a safe place to try. The results support Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) and Long's (2005) argument that needs analysis should take account of both objective and subjective learner factors. By incorporating these elements into speaking material design, teaching becomes relevant, personalized and truly communicative for EFL students.

### Learning Needs

The students' responses and in-class behavior indicate the necessity to mix different input channels, active participation together with mentoring. One said, *"I like to study with videos so I can hear what people are saying and see how they're saying it."* This reinforces Nunan (2003) and Richards and Rodgers' (2011) opinion that real audio-visual input aids comprehension, and memory. Visual context, and that spoken through examples, combines to help learners "absorb" language in a more natural setting.

Interactive exercises like games and group projects are crucial for maintaining student interest and enhancing their self-esteem. Students who work together experience less anxiety and get better peer support. This is consistent with research by Rahimi and Fathi (2021), Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei (2016), and Savignon (2002). *"When students sit in groups, they talk more naturally,"* a teacher observed, demonstrating how peer-to-peer learning promotes genuine communication. As recommended by Derakhshan et al. (2016), teachers should increase the number of speaking exercises in pairs and groups because they can help students develop fluency

by exposing them to real-world situations on a regular basis. Furthermore, these results show that social interaction serves as more than just a teaching tool; it also inspires students and keeps them confident enough to speak.

The inclination for laid-back classroom settings is consistent with research by Larsen-Freeman (2011) and Renandya and Widodo (2016) showing that low-anxiety settings promote greater engagement. When given the opportunity to work together and take charge of discussions, students were able to express themselves more, according to observations. This suggests that the environment in the classroom plays a significant role in influencing how students learn, particularly when they are reluctant to speak up for fear of being judged negatively. In addition to encouraging verbal engagement, fostering a supportive classroom environment increases student autonomy and trust.

On top of that, how teachers and learners function today lines up with a more students driven style. Instead of leading, educators guide by setting up chances to interact. Learners, meanwhile, handle their progress themselves (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This shared setup fits what Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) stands for focus on exchange, thinking things through, and making choices about one's own path. When pupils view education as teamwork instead of top-down control, their drive grows. Rahmi and Fathi noticed this back in 2021- alongside a stronger urge to speak up. So, shifting responsibilities around while using loose teaching set ups helps hold students attention during talk- based tasks.

In sum, lens of students' voices by means of interviews and observations provides a holistic understanding of students' learning preferences and difficulties. The results provide evidence to suggest effective sets of speaking materials are integrative in nature and integrate a variety of sources, real world contexts and emotional supportive learning framework. These results validate the concept that instructional design should adhere to learners' dynamic needs and classroom context, as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Richards (2017). This study brings together quantitative and descriptive insights that form a solid basis for the development of linguistically strong, psychologically supportive speaking materials, relevant to real-life contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study provide a clear understanding of students' goals and learning needs regarding their speaking skills in the Conversation Program in MTs Miftahul Lubab Ngawi. Results indicated that students desired to become fluent and confident in communicating. Their learning needs involved interactive and enjoyable activities, supported by audiovisual materials and group settings. Such findings highlight that appropriate speaking instruction must consider not only language skills but also emotional and motivational aspects that relate to students' willingness to communicate.

The study concludes that speaking materials should be prepared in view of a detailed needs analysis considering students' goals, necessities, gaps, and desires; teachers should create communicative and student-centered activities such as role plays, discussions, and games that provide students with genuine interaction opportunities. Using audiovisual media and encouraging peer collaboration can enhance students' participation, reduce anxiety, and foster confidence. These findings again suggest that if English is taught in line with the students' actual needs, their language learning will be more meaningful and permanent. Further research is needed to



investigate how to adapt needs-based speaking materials to different educational levels and how far students are influenced in terms of long-term communication skills.

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