

# EXPLORATION OF CIRCLE TIME PRACTICE AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the practice of *Circle Time* as a means of developing speaking skills in elementary school students. Speaking skills are one of the important language competencies that students have in the communication and learning process. The problems that arise in the field show that many students have difficulty expressing ideas orally in a coherent, confident manner, and according to the context. Through the application of *Circle Time*, speaking activities are systematically designed with a fun, participatory, and focused atmosphere on students' personal experiences. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach supported by simple quantitative data through the results of observations, interviews, and documentation of learning activities at SD Labschool, State University of Semarang. The research subjects consisted of 24 grade IV students. The results showed a significant improvement in students' speaking skills, which was shown by an increase in the average score from 60 on the pre-test to 81 on the post-test. The interactive learning atmosphere, peer support, and teachers' strategies in managing *Circle Time* sessions have been proven to increase students' courage, fluency, and ability to organize ideas orally. The findings of this study reinforce that *Circle Time* can be used as an effective learning model for the development of speaking skills in elementary schools. In addition, the application of this method also contributes to the improvement of the social and emotional climate in the classroom.

**Keywords –** *Circle Time*, speaking skills, interactive learning, elementary school

## Introduction

Speaking skills are one of the important aspects of language learning that serves as the primary means of oral communication. Through speaking skills, students can express ideas, feelings, and ideas effectively in a variety of social and academic contexts. In the context of basic education, good speaking skills not only support communication success, but also become the basis for the development of critical thinking, collaborative, and confidence-building skills. However, the reality on the ground shows that speaking skills are often not the main focus in language learning in primary schools. Most language learning activities place more emphasis on reading and writing skills, while

speaking skills are often overlooked or only done incidentally.

The results of initial observations at SD Labschool, Semarang State University showed that most students had difficulty conveying ideas sequentially, using varied vocabulary, and maintaining eye contact when speaking in front of the class. In addition, awkwardness and lack of confidence also appear when students are asked to speak spontaneously. This has an impact on low student participation in discussion and presentation activities in class. Teachers face challenges in creating a safe, comfortable, and conducive learning environment for students to express themselves freely. Therefore, a learning approach is needed that is able

to foster active participation and the courage to speak in a fun atmosphere.

One of the approaches that is considered effective to overcome this problem is Circle Time. Circle Time is a learning activity that is carried out in a circle, where all participants sit together in an aligned position to share experiences, views, or feelings. According to Mosley (2011), Circle Time aims to create opportunities for every child to talk, listen, and feel valued by their peers. According to Collins, C. (2022), *Circle Time* is a means of building empathy and social interaction for students. *Circle Time* is also an inclusive communication practice in primary and preschool (Rönnerman, K. (2024)). The non-hierarchical atmosphere created in Circle Time allows for the establishment of two-way communication between teachers and students as well as between students naturally. This approach emphasizes emotional, social, and moral engagement as an integral part of the learning process.

Previous studies support the effectiveness of Circle Time in the development of children's speaking and social skills. Glazzard (2018) stated that Circle Time is able to foster students' confidence and ability to manage emotions through story-sharing activities. Similarly, research by Cefai et al. (2013) confirms that Circle Time activities have a positive impact on the social-emotional skills and communication skills of elementary school students. In Indonesia, several studies have also shown similar results. Rohmawati (2025) developed a Circle Time e-module which has been proven to improve students' narrative and verbal expression skills. These findings show that the Circle Time model can be adapted to the context of basic education in Indonesia effectively.

Nurhayati, D., & Handayani, W. (2022) Emphasizing participatory strategies similar to *Circle Time* in improving oral communication skills.

In addition to strengthening speaking skills, Circle Time also plays a role in building a positive classroom climate. Samihah Hilyati et al. (2024) emphasized that Circle Time activities create effective communication that strengthens social skills, empathy, and collaboration between students. Thus, Circle Time is not only a means of language development, but also a vehicle to form a harmonious and mutually respectful social character. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, this approach is in line with the principles of student-centered learning and oriented towards strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, especially the dimensions of "critical reasoning" and "working together".

Based on the description above, this study aims to explore the application of Circle Time as a means of developing speaking skills for elementary school students. The research focus is directed at how teachers design, implement, and evaluate Circle Time activities and the extent of their impact on improving students' speaking skills. More specifically, this study answers three main questions: (1) how the practice of Circle Time is applied in elementary school learning, (2) how it impacts the improvement of students' speaking skills, and (3) what factors support the successful implementation of Circle Time.

This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of Indonesian language learning in elementary schools. Theoretically, the results of the research can enrich studies on the application of

humanistic and participatory approaches in language learning. Meanwhile, practically, the results of the research can be a reference for teachers to develop a learning model that fosters active participation and the courage to speak for students. Thus, *Circle Time* can be a relevant, applicative, and appropriate learning innovation for the 21st century competency development.

### Method

This study uses a **qualitative descriptive** approach supported by simple quantitative data to strengthen the results of the analysis. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was to describe in depth the practice of *implementing Circle Time* and its effect on the speaking skills of elementary school students. Qualitative descriptive design allows researchers to understand learning phenomena from the perspective of participants through direct observation, interviews, and analysis of learning documents.

### Research Subject

The subject of the study was grade IV students of SD Labschool, State University of Semarang, which amounted to 24 students, consisting of 12 male students and 12 female students. This class was chosen purposively because it shows a fairly diverse variety of speaking skills and participation, so that it is in line with the objectives of exploring *the practice of Circle Time*. In addition to students, grade IV teachers are also involved as the main informants to provide data on the implementation of activities and evaluation of learning outcomes.

### Research design and procedure

The research was carried out for three months, covering three main stages: (1) the preparation stage, (2) the implementation stage, and (3) the

evaluation stage. In the preparation stage, the researcher coordinates with the teacher to develop a plan for the implementation of *Circle Time*-based learning. Teachers and researchers jointly determine discussion themes relevant to the student's experience, such as "vacation experience", "my best friend", and "how to take care of the school environment".

The implementation stage was carried out for six meetings. Each *Circle Time* session lasts about 40 minutes, starting with an opening activity in the form of a short game (*ice breaking*), followed by a story-sharing and discussion session. Teachers act as facilitators who maintain a positive atmosphere and give every student an equal opportunity to speak. At the end of the session, students and teachers do a brief reflection on the content and feelings that arise during the activity.

The evaluation stage was carried out by comparing the results of speaking skills before and after the application of *Circle Time*. In addition, teachers and students were interviewed to obtain responses to their perceived learning experiences. Documentation of activities in the form of observation notes and photos was used to strengthen the findings data. Contextual research in Indonesia that strengthens the relevance of *the Circle Time model* in elementary grades.

### Research Instruments

The instruments used include:

1. Observation Sheets, used to record the activities of teachers and students during *Circle Time activities*.
2. The Speaking Skills Test, in the form of assessing students' oral performance before and after the

activity, with indicators of fluency, diction accuracy, sentence structure, and nonverbal expression.

3. The Interview Guidelines, used to explore students' and teachers' perceptions of the benefits of Circle Time.

4. Documentation, in the form of photos of activities and reflective notes of teachers.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis technique of the Miles and Huberman (1994) model which included three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Quantitative data from pretest and post-test results were analyzed using percentage improvement calculations to strengthen the description of qualitative results. The analysis was carried out repeatedly to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation, and the results were verified through triangulation of data sources between observations, interviews, and documentation.

This combination approach of qualitative descriptive and simple quantitative data is expected to provide a complete picture of how *Circle Time* is applied, the changes that occur in students, and the factors that affect their success.

### **Finding and Discussion**

#### ***Circle Time Preparation***

*Circle Time* is an oral language skill consisting of listening and speaking skills. Learning oral language skills *invites* students to practice understanding and using spoken language properly and communicatively. To achieve this goal, teachers should be encouraged to design and implement varied listening and

speaking learning activities so that the learning experience is meaningful for students. Preparation *Circle time* by preparing students in oral language describes simple items or objects that students bring or students see. Then in turn, students speak in front of the class by bringing items or objects that are brought or seen.

Here's a picture of one of the students talking:



Figure 1. Students do *circle time*

Seating management when *circle time* is carried out in a semicircular pattern and students sit on the floor while teachers pay attention to comfort and create a pleasant atmosphere for students. Before doing *circle time*, a) the teacher makes a daily schedule containing the names of the students who will get their turn, the hour, b) all students get a turn. One day two or three students can come forward to talk in the future, c) students are reminded to prepare the items to be told, d) before the activity is carried out, the teacher and students make an agreement on the type of goods or objects to be delivered, the attitude of speaking, what is conveyed, the attitude of questioning, the attitude of listening, e) the activity is not more than 5 minutes every day.

#### ***Circle Time Results***

The results of the research were obtained through observation, speaking skills tests, and interviews with students and teachers of grade IV of SD

Labschool, State University of Semarang. Circle *Time* activities are held in six meetings with different themes every week. The teacher acts as a facilitator who directs, asks guiding questions, and keeps each student from having the opportunity to speak in turn.

Before *the Circle Time* activity started, a pretest was carried out to measure students' speaking ability. Preliminary results show that most students still show difficulty in conveying ideas in a concise and clear manner. The average student speaking ability score in the pretest stage was 60, with a completeness rate of only 25%.

After the implementation of *Circle Time* for six meetings, a final test was carried out to determine the improvement of speaking skills. The results showed a significant improvement in various aspects of speech, including fluency in speech, clarity of voice, courage to express opinions, and accuracy in language use.

The following is a summary of the results of improving students' speaking skills:

Table 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results of Students' Speaking Skills

NO	Aspec ts	Pre- test	Post- test	Incr ease (%)
		Assess ed	Ave rage Scor e	Avera ge Score
1.	Fluen cy in speaki ng	61	83	36%
2.	Clarit y and pronu nciati on	58	79	36%

3.	Accur acy of word choic e	60	80	33%
4.	Sente nce struct ure and seque nce	59	82	39%
5.	Eye expre ssion and conta ct	62	81	31%
Ov erall ave rag e		60	81	35 %

The above data shows that after *the Circle Time* activity, the average student's speaking ability increased from **60 to 81**, or an increase of about **35%**. The classical comprehension rate increased from **25% to 87.5%**, which means that most students have achieved the criteria of good speaking ability.

In addition to the quantitative improvement, the observation results showed changes in student behavior in participating during the activity. At first, some students look passive and shy of speaking. However, as the *Circle Time* sessions progressed, they began to show confidence, were able to speak with good eye contact, and responded politely.

The class teacher also confirmed that there was an improvement in the classroom atmosphere that was more conducive and collaborative. Students become more open in expressing

opinions and learn to respect the views of others. The activity of sharing daily experiences turns out to provide space for students to learn to communicate naturally without academic pressure

### Conclusions

The results of this study show that the application of *Circle Time* is effective in improving the speaking skills of elementary school students. This increase occurs because *Circle Time* provides an equal communication space between teachers and students, as well as providing a fun and interactive learning experience.

According to Mosley (2011), *Circle Time* is designed to create a fair opportunity for every child to be able to speak and be listened to without interruption. The non-hierarchical atmosphere that is built up makes students feel safe to speak without fear of criticism. This is in line with Vygotsky's theory of social learning which emphasizes that children's language development and cognition are influenced by supportive social interactions and environments.

In the context of learning in elementary school, *Circle Time* activities foster a sense of belonging among students. Every child feels like an important part of the classroom community. The reflective nature of this activity also strengthens empathy and listening skills. The results of the interviews showed that students enjoyed the opportunity to tell each other stories and hear their friends' stories, which had a positive impact on their learning motivation.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of Cefai et al. (2013) who stated that *Circle Time* can improve emotional well-being, strengthen social relationships, and

develop children's verbal communication skills. Research by Samihah Hilyati et al. (2024) also confirms that effective communication in Beyond Centers and Circle Time contributes to improving children's language and cognitive abilities.

From the pedagogical side, *Circle Time* activities provide an alternative to a student-centered learning model. Teachers play the role of facilitators, not as the main source of information. This two-way interaction pattern is in line with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of empowering students to become active and reflective learners.

The success of the application of *Circle Time* in this study is influenced by several supporting factors. First, the role of teachers as consistent facilitators in creating a safe and positive atmosphere. Teachers provide constructive feedback and use inclusive language. Second, peer support that motivates each other and helps students who are still shy to participate. Third, the theme of the activity is contextual and close to students' lives, so they have many ideas to share.

This finding is also in line with the opinion of Rohmawati (2025) that the success of *Circle Time* is determined by the teacher's ability to manage group dynamics and choose topics that are relevant to the child's experience. When students feel the topics discussed are close to their world, participation increases significantly.

In addition to the benefits for the development of speaking skills, *Circle Time* also contributes to the formation of students' social character. Students learn to wait their turns, respect their friends' opinions, and express their

feelings politely. This shows that *Circle Time* has strong social-emotional learning (SEL) values.

In general, the findings of this study confirm that *Circle Time* activities can be used as an effective learning strategy to improve speaking skills and at the same time build a positive learning environment. This model is adaptable, does not require special means, and can be applied by teachers in a variety of primary school contexts.

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