

Comparative Analysis of Spoken Language Use in Formal and Non-Formal Communication: A Study of Eighth-Grade Students at MTsN 1 Mukomuko, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Spoken language competence is essential for students to adapt to different social and academic contexts, yet many learners face challenges in shifting between formal and non-formal communication registers. This study aimed to analyze differences in spoken language use between formal and non-formal communication contexts among eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mukomuko. Using a quantitative ex post facto design, data were collected from 62 students, consisting of 17 in formal situations and 45 in non-formal situations, through questionnaires, observations, documentation, and interviews. The instruments were validated through Pearson's Product-Moment correlation and achieved strong reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.848. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including tests of normality, homogeneity, and independent-sample t-tests with a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$. The results revealed a significant difference in students' spoken language performance between the two contexts, with higher mean scores observed in non-formal situations ($M = 31.46$) compared to formal situations ($M = 28.70$), and the t-test result ($t = -2.226$, $p = 0.030$) confirmed the hypothesis. These findings indicate that students display more flexible, expressive, and spontaneous linguistic patterns in non-formal communication, whereas formal contexts require structured and rule-based expression. The novelty of this study lies in its systematic comparison of formal and non-formal spoken language within the same population, offering insights rarely addressed in Indonesian educational research. The implications suggest that educators should design balanced pedagogical strategies that foster both formal accuracy and non-formal fluency to strengthen students' overall oral communication skills.

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Introduction

Oral communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, serving as a medium for knowledge transfer, socialization, and identity formation across formal and non-formal contexts. In formal settings, spoken language reflects standardized structures, clarity, and adherence to linguistic norms that support academic, professional, and institutional communication (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Elsayed, 2024; Gebremariam et al., 2024). By contrast, non-formal oral communication tends to be spontaneous, flexible, and often marked by colloquial or localized

expressions, enabling individuals to build social connections and negotiate meaning in more relaxed settings (Curtis, 2018; Pérez Fernández, 2024). Both contexts are equally important because the ability to shift between formal and non-formal registers is indicative of communicative competence, cultural literacy, and adaptability in diverse social interactions (Dwivedi et al., 2021, 2023; Valladares, 2021). In educational environments, especially among adolescents, spoken language practices provide insights into students' linguistic development and their capacity to engage effectively in varied communicative situations (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024; Ramadan Elbaoui Shaddad & Jember, 2024; Yan et al., 2024).

Despite the recognition of oral communication as a central skill, research has consistently shown that many students struggle to adjust their spoken language appropriately depending on context. In formal communication, learners often face difficulties in mastering vocabulary, constructing grammatically correct sentences, and using appropriate intonation, which reduces the clarity and effectiveness of interaction (Aizawa et al., 2023; Almelhes, 2023). Conversely, in non-formal situations, students may over-rely on slang, code-mixing, or local dialects, which, while fostering peer solidarity, can hinder their ability to transition smoothly to formal registers required in academic and professional domains (Saint-Georges & Weber, 2013). Studies across different contexts underline the importance of code-switching and register awareness as crucial skills that reflect not only linguistic proficiency but also social and cultural intelligence (Alowidha, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Yim & Clément, 2021). In the Indonesian context, language use is further shaped by the coexistence of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, alongside regional dialects and local vernaculars, making the distinction between formal and non-formal oral communication particularly salient (Atmawati et al., 2024; Chali & Parapatics, 2024; Zein et al., 2020).

Recent empirical studies in Indonesia emphasize that students frequently use informal oral language more than formal registers in classroom settings, reflecting broader sociolinguistic patterns of youth language use (Ntou, 2024; Permana & Rohmah, 2024; Rose et al., 2021). For instance, adolescents often employ non-standard vocabulary and structures even in contexts that demand formality, such as classroom discussions or presentations, which may undermine the communicative objectives of education (Brinia et al., 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Zickafoose et al., 2024). While previous research has examined aspects of language acquisition, code-switching, and sociolinguistic variation, there remains limited systematic analysis comparing how students differentiate spoken language in formal versus non-formal situations within the same institutional and cultural context (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2023; Piccione et al., 2024). Moreover, studies on junior high school students' communicative practices in Indonesia have tended to focus on written language or general literacy skills rather than detailed comparisons of oral communication across registers (Guo & Asmawi, 2024; Lusta et al., 2023; Zein et al., 2020).

This gap highlights the need for empirical investigation into the comparative use of spoken language in formal and non-formal communicative situations, particularly among junior high school students who are at a critical stage of developing linguistic and social competence. Unlike prior studies that addressed oral communication in broader sociolinguistic or literacy contexts, the present research specifically aims to analyze the differences in spoken language use between formal and non-formal situations among eighth-grade students at MTsN 1

Mukomuko. By employing an ex post facto design supported by statistical testing, this study seeks to provide systematic evidence on whether significant differences exist in the students’ oral communication practices across contexts. The results are expected to enrich the body of literature on sociolinguistics and language education in Indonesia, offering insights for educators to design pedagogical strategies that strengthen students’ ability to navigate both formal and informal communicative domains effectively.

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative approach using an ex post facto design to examine differences in the use of spoken language in formal and non-formal communication situations among eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mukomuko. The ex post facto design was chosen because the independent variables, namely the context of communication (formal and non-formal), had already occurred and could not be manipulated directly by the researchers. The study population consisted of 62 students, with 17 participating in formal communication settings and 45 in non-formal contexts. Data were collected through questionnaires, observations, documentation, and interviews, which together provided a comprehensive picture of students’ spoken language practices. The research instruments were validated using Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation, resulting in the elimination of invalid items to ensure construct validity, while reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.848, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.60. Data analysis employed descriptive and inferential statistics, including tests of normality, homogeneity, and hypothesis testing using independent-sample t-tests with a significance level of $p < 0.05$, supported by IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, with research permission obtained from the school administration, voluntary participation of students ensured, and anonymity maintained throughout the data collection and reporting process. This methodological design allowed for a rigorous and ethically sound investigation of how students’ spoken language varies between formal and non-formal communication contexts.

Results and Discussion

Instrument Validity Test

The validity of the research instrument was tested using Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation, as shown in [Table 1](#). The results indicated that all items had correlation coefficients (r-count) higher than the r-table value (0.254) at a significance level of 5%, confirming that the items were valid for measuring differences in students’ spoken language across formal and non-formal situations.

Table 1. Instrument Validity Test Results

Variable	Question	R Counted	R Table	Sig.	Decision
Use of Oral Language in Formal and Informal Communication Contexts	x1	0.750	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x2	0.800	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x3	0.667	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x4	0.807	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x5	0.641	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x6	0.646	0.248	0.000	Valid

Variable	Question	R Counted	R Table	Sig.	Decision
	x7	0.510	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x8	0.439	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x11	0.645	0.248	0.000	Valid
	x12	0.664	0.248	0.000	Valid

Reliability Test

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, and the results are presented in [Table 2](#). The alpha coefficient of 0.848 exceeded the threshold of 0.60, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable.

Table 2. Instrument Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Critical Value	Remarks
Use of Oral Language in Formal and Informal Communication Contexts	0.848	0.600	Reliabel

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of students' spoken language scores are presented in [Table 3](#). The mean score for students in formal communication was 77.94, while the mean score for students in non-formal communication was 65.29. This suggests that students performed better in formal communication situations compared to non-formal ones.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Spoken Language

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Formal	28.71	4.12	22	35
Non Formal	31.47	4.44	21	40

Normality Test

Kolmogorov-Smirnov results in [Table 4](#) confirmed that both groups had p-values above 0.05, meaning the data were normally distributed and suitable for parametric testing.

Table 4. Normality Test Results

Group	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Formal	.097	17	.200
Non Formal	.084	45	.200

Homogeneity Test

The homogeneity test (Levene's test) showed a p-value of 0.857 (>0.05), indicating that the variance between the two groups was homogeneous.

Table 5. Homogeneity Test Results

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	.033	1	60	.857
Based on Median	.023	1	60	.881
Based on Median and with adjusted df	.023	1	58.442	.881

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on trimmed mean	.032	1	60	.859

Independent-Sample t-Test

The hypothesis test was conducted using an independent-sample t-test to examine whether there were significant differences in students' spoken language performance between formal and non-formal communication situations. As presented in Table 6, the mean score of the non-formal group (n = 45) was 31.46, while the mean score of the formal group (n = 17) was 28.70. The t-test yielded a value of $t = -2.226$, with a critical value of $t_{table} = 2.000$ at the 5% significance level. The significance value obtained was 0.030, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted.

Table 6. Independent-Sample t-Test Results

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df
Formal	17	28.70	4.12		
Non-Formal	45	31.46	4.44	-2.226	60

These results demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference between students' spoken language use in formal and non-formal communication contexts. Students tended to use spoken language more actively and flexibly in non-formal situations, as reflected in their higher mean score compared to formal contexts. Thus, the findings confirm that communication context strongly influences the way students employ spoken language in classroom and everyday interactions

Discussion

The results demonstrate that students at MTsN 1 Mukomuko performed significantly better in spoken language when engaged in formal communication compared to non-formal communication. This aligns with findings by Lorenz (2021), who observed that structured classroom settings promote greater linguistic discipline. Similarly, research by Darling-Hammond (2020) confirmed that students adapt more effectively to formal registers when guided by institutional norms. The findings also corroborate international studies such as those by Bernhofer and Tonin (2022), Garten (2019), and Li (2017), which emphasize the impact of context on linguistic choices and performance.

In contrast, non-formal communication situations provided greater freedom but often reduced linguistic accuracy, echoing the results of Wang (2024), who noted that informal peer interactions encourage fluency but not grammatical precision. This pattern also parallels Giles and Coupland's (2019) communication accommodation theory, which argues that speakers modify their language according to situational expectations, often at the expense of accuracy in casual contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative focus on formal and non-formal spoken language within a single junior high school context in Indonesia, offering empirical evidence on how situational factors influence student linguistic competence. While previous studies have often focused on either formal or informal communication separately, this study provides a

direct statistical comparison that highlights the magnitude of difference between the two contexts.

The implications of these findings are significant for language education and pedagogy. Teachers should design learning activities that not only emphasize mastery of formal registers for academic and professional purposes but also recognize the pedagogical value of informal communication in promoting fluency and confidence. Integrating role-play, debate, and peer dialogue into curricula could provide students with balanced exposure to both communication modes, thereby enhancing their overall communicative competence.

However, the study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to one school, reducing the generalizability of the results. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported and observed performance may not fully capture the complexity of students' linguistic abilities. Future research should expand to larger populations, incorporate longitudinal designs, and consider additional variables such as gender, socioeconomic background, and digital communication modes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of spoken language use among students.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that there are significant differences in students' spoken language performance between formal and non-formal communication contexts among eighth-grade students at MTsN 1 Mukomuko, as evidenced by the results of the independent-sample t-test which showed a higher mean score in non-formal situations compared to formal ones. These findings indicate that communication context strongly influences students' linguistic choices, with non-formal settings providing greater flexibility, spontaneity, and expressive freedom, while formal contexts demand more structured, disciplined, and rule-bound language use. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic comparison of formal and non-formal spoken language use within the same student population, an area that has received limited scholarly attention in the Indonesian context. The results imply that educators should adopt balanced teaching strategies that not only emphasize mastery of formal spoken language for academic and professional purposes but also recognize the value of non-formal communication in fostering confidence, creativity, and social interaction skills. Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its relatively small sample size and the absence of longitudinal observation, suggesting that future research should expand to diverse educational contexts and employ mixed-methods approaches to provide a deeper understanding of how communication contexts shape students' oral language development.

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