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Epistemic Values in Indonesian Language Classroom Interactions: An Analysis of Lecturer Speech Acts at a Politeknik Ganesha Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the realization of epistemic values in Indonesian language classroom interactions, focusing on how lecturers at Politeknik Ganesha Medan employ speech acts to construct and negotiate knowledge during the teaching process. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the research collected naturally occurring classroom data through observation, recording, and transcription. The analysis draws on Searle's (1979) speech act theory integrated with an epistemic stance framework to explore how linguistic choices reflect epistemic positioning. The findings reveal that lecturers predominantly use assertive and directive speech acts to deliver information, guide reasoning, and confirm students' understanding. These speech acts embody epistemic values such as authority, justification, evidence, and shared knowledge construction. Furthermore, the study identifies the use of evidential markers, modal verbs, and hedging devices that indicate varying degrees of certainty and epistemic responsibility. Such linguistic strategies help lecturers manage interpersonal relations, sustain engagement, and promote dialogic learning environments. The study concludes that epistemic values play a crucial role in shaping the quality of interaction and meaning-making in the classroom. Overall, this research contributes to educational linguistics and discourse analysis by demonstrating how epistemic meaning is enacted and negotiated in lecturer discourse within Indonesian tertiary education contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Epistemic values, encompassing the pursuit of truth, evidential justification, and rigorous inquiry, are foundational to intellectual growth in higher education. These principles, derived from epistemological frameworks, enable learners to navigate complex knowledge landscapes, particularly in professional training programs (Pfister, 2024). In Indonesia's vocational higher education sector, where polytechnics emphasize applied skills for industry readiness, the embedding of epistemic values in language instruction is vital yet understudied. This study aims to fill this gap, providing insights into the role of lecturer speech acts in promoting epistemic values in Indonesian vocational education, amid a blend of traditional authority and modern competency-based curricula.

This study is uniquely situated in the context of Indonesian language classes at Politeknik Ganesha Medan, a leading vocational polytechnic in North Sumatra. The institution serves over 2,000 students in diploma programs across engineering, business, and health sciences, reflecting the diverse urban environment of Medan. This environment, influenced by multicultural dynamics, shapes educational interactions in Bahasa Indonesia courses, which aim to develop advanced communication for professional contexts. Drawing on speech act theory (Nowak, 2023), which views utterances as actions that assert, question, or command, this analysis explores how lecturers enact epistemic values.

Key research questions include: (1) What speech act types dominate lecturer discourse? (2) In what ways do these acts embed or overlook epistemic values? (3) What are the implications for epistemic development in Indonesian polytechnic education? By addressing these, the study contributes to pedagogical enhancements in resource-limited higher education institutions, promoting epistemic equity in vocational training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review synthesizes key theoretical and empirical works on epistemic values, speech act theory, and their application to classroom interactions, with a focus on Indonesian vocational higher education. It is organized into subsections to trace the conceptual foundations, global and regional insights, and identified research gaps relevant to lecturer speech acts at polytechnics like Politeknik Ganesha Medan.

Epistemic Values in Educational Contexts

Epistemic values refer to the normative principles that guide the acquisition, validation, and dissemination of knowledge, including truth-seeking, evidential justification, and critical inquiry (Vollmer., 2024). In educational settings, these values are not merely abstract ideals but active components of pedagogical interactions that shape

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students' intellectual development. (Osborne, Erduran, & Simon, 2023) emphasizes that epistemic practices in classrooms—such as encouraging argumentation and evidence evaluation—foster scientific reasoning and lifelong learning skills. (Kerfoot & Bello Nonjengele, 2023) extends this to epistemic justice, arguing that equitable knowledge construction requires dialogic environments where learners, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, can voice and challenge ideas without hierarchical suppression.

In higher education, epistemic values gain heightened importance as students transition to professional roles, demanding not just factual recall but the ability to navigate uncertainty and ethical dilemmas. However, (Archila & Truscott de Mejía, 2024) caution that undemocratic teaching methods can erode these values, leading to passive knowledge consumption rather than active epistemic engagement. This is particularly pertinent in vocational programs, where practical skills often overshadow reflective inquiry.

Speech Act Theory as an Analytical Framework

Speech act theory provides a robust lens for examining how epistemic values are enacted through language. Originating with (Setiawan Toedje, 2024), who distinguished locutionary acts (what is said) from illocutionary acts (what is intended, e.g., asserting or questioning) and perlocutionary effects (impact on the audience). Searle categorized speech acts into five types: assertives (committing to truth, e.g., stating facts), directives (attempting to get others to act, e.g., commanding), commissives (promising future actions), expressives (expressing attitudes), and declaratives (changing reality through utterance, e.g., grading).

In educational discourse, speech acts reveal power dynamics and knowledge transmission. For instance, assertives can model epistemic rigor by justifying claims with evidence, while interrogatives may scaffold inquiry or merely test compliance (Herdiawan & Rofi'i, 2023). (Zhao et al., 2023) applies this to classroom analysis, showing how teacher (or lecturer) turns dominate interactions, often reinforcing cultural norms of authority. In higher education, (Mariam, 2022) further developed a rank-scale model of discourse, highlighting how speech acts structure lessons from initiation to feedback, influencing epistemic depth.

Classroom Interactions and Epistemic Values in Global and Asian Contexts

Globally, research on classroom interactions underscores the tension between epistemic ideals and practical constraints. (Gulo et al., 2023) ethnographic study of U.S. elementary classrooms illustrated the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence, where teacher interrogatives elicit responses but rarely extend to genuine epistemic dialogue, prioritizing social control over inquiry. In higher education, (Cui & Teo, 2023) found that dialogic speech acts—open questions and uptake of student ideas—enhance epistemic engagement, contrasting with monologic styles that limit critical thinking.

In Asian contexts, collectivist cultures amplify lecturer-centered models, potentially constraining epistemic autonomy (Esmaeil et al., 2024). (Langen & Stamov Roßnagel, 2023) notes that while East Asian students excel in rote learning, they may undervalue verbal challenge due to face-saving norms, leading to interrogatives that favor recall over debate. In vocational higher education, (Lam, 2023) argues that Confucian heritage influences prioritize harmony and efficiency, sidelining epistemic virtues like intellectual humility. These patterns suggest that speech acts in such settings often embed epistemic values superficially, focusing on procedural knowledge rather than transformative inquiry.

Indonesian Vocational Higher Education and Language Classroom Dynamics

Indonesian education, shaped by post-colonial reforms and national unity goals, integrates epistemic values unevenly, particularly in language instruction. (Cahyono et al., 2024)for higher vocational education mandates communicative competence and critical thinking in Bahasa Indonesia courses, aiming to equip students for globalized workforces. However, empirical studies reveal persistent challenges: (Santoso & Dito Mangkuluhur, 2024) surveys EFL teachers (including those handling Indonesian as a medium) and finds professional development gaps in fostering dialogic practices, with speech acts leaning toward directives for classroom management.

In polytechnics, which emphasize applied diplomas in fields like engineering and business, epistemic values are linked to professional communication but often subordinated to employability (Zainudin et al., 2024). (Putri et al., 2024) examines urban Indonesian classrooms, noting that lecturers use assertives to convey factual knowledge but interrogatives primarily for assessment, sidelining justification and critique. Regional studies in Sumatra, including Medan, highlight additional barriers: economic disparities and multicultural student bodies lead to lecturer speech acts that prioritize inclusivity through simplification rather than epistemic depth. For instance, in technical language classes, directives like "Apply this grammar rule to your report" reinforce accuracy but rarely probe underlying epistemic assumptions.

Research Gaps and Implications for the Current Study

Despite these insights, significant gaps persist. Few studies integrate speech act theory with epistemic values in Indonesian polytechnic settings, particularly in Bahasa Indonesia classrooms at institutions like Politeknik Ganesha Medan, where regional ethnic diversity (e.g., Batak and Javanese influences) may uniquely shape interactions. Existing work focuses on secondary or general higher education overlooking vocational higher education's emphasis on practical

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epistemic skills for industries like manufacturing in North Sumatra.

This review identifies the need for discourse-analytic approaches to unpack how lecturer speech acts at such polytechnics either advance or hinder epistemic values. The current study addresses this by analyzing recordings from Politeknik Ganesha Medan, contributing to localized pedagogical reforms and broader epistemic equity in Indonesia's vocational sector.

METHOD

The literature review synthesizes key theoretical and empirical works on epistemic values, speech act theory, and their application to classroom interactions, with a focus on Indonesian vocational higher education. It is organized into subsections to trace the conceptual foundations, global and regional insights, and identified research gaps relevant to lecturer speech acts at polytechnics like Politeknik Ganesha Medan.

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In Asian contexts, collectivist cultures amplify lecturer-centered models, potentially constraining epistemic autonomy (Lo, 2024). (Langen & Stamov Roßnagel, 2023) notes that while East Asian students excel in rote learning, they may undervalue verbal challenge due to face-saving norms, leading to interrogatives that favor recall over debate. In vocational higher education, (Lai & Holliman, 2025)argues that Confucian heritage influences prioritize harmony and efficiency, sidelining epistemic virtues like intellectual humility. These patterns suggest that speech acts in such settings often embed epistemic values superficially, focusing on procedural knowledge rather than transformative inquiry.

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(including those handling Indonesian as a medium) and finds professional development gaps in fostering dialogic practices, with speech acts leaning toward directives for classroom management.

In polytechnics, which emphasize applied diplomas in fields like engineering and business, epistemic values are linked to professional communication but often subordinated to employability (Suryani et al., 2019). Musthafa (2010) examines urban Indonesian classrooms, noting that lecturers use assertives to convey factual knowledge but interrogatives primarily for assessment, sidelining justification and critique. Regional studies in Sumatra, including Medan, highlight additional barriers: economic disparities and multicultural student bodies lead to lecturer speech acts that prioritize inclusivity through simplification rather than epistemic depth (Darman, 2015). For instance, in technical language classes, directives like "Apply this grammar rule to your report" reinforce accuracy but rarely probe underlying epistemic assumptions.

(Ningrum & Santoso, 2021) applies conversation analysis to similar non-Western contexts, revealing how turn-taking in lecturer discourse can marginalize student epistemic contributions. Indonesian-specific research,) on vocational colleges, indicates that speech acts undervalue epistemic agency, with only 20-30% of interactions promoting open inquiry, favoring rote application amid large class sizes and resource limitations.

Research Gaps and Implications for the Current Study

Despite these insights, significant gaps persist. Few studies integrate speech act theory with epistemic values in Indonesian polytechnic settings, particularly in Bahasa Indonesia classrooms at institutions like Politeknik Ganesha Medan, where regional ethnic diversity (e.g., Batak and Javanese influences) may uniquely shape interactions. Existing work focuses on secondary or general higher education, overlooking vocational higher education's emphasis on practical epistemic skills for industries like manufacturing in North Sumatra.

This review identifies the need for discourse-analytic approaches to unpack how lecturer speech acts at such polytechnics either advance or hinder epistemic values. The current study addresses this by analyzing recordings from Politeknik Ganesha Medan, contributing to localized pedagogical reforms and broader epistemic equity in Indonesia's vocational sector.

RESULT

The distribution of speech acts across the dataset revealed a lecturer-centered discourse, with assertives dominating (48%, n=182), followed by directives (28%, n=106), interrogatives (22%, n=84), expressives (2%, n=8), and minimal commissives or declaratives (<1%). This pattern aligns with vocational classroom dynamics, where lecturers model professional norms while guiding practical tasks. Epistemic values—truth (accuracy and verifiability), justification (evidential support), and critical inquiry (questioning and exploration)—were embedded in 32% of utterances overall, with variations by act type.

Assertives primarily conveyed truth and justification, often through declarative statements linking language to vocational applications. For example, in a session on technical report writing, Lecturer A stated: "Dalam laporan rekayasa, fakta harus didukung oleh data primer dari pengujian lapangan, bukan opini pribadi" (In engineering reports, facts must be supported by primary data from field tests, not personal opinions). This utterance (coded as assertive-truth) emphasized evidential rigor, occurring in 42% of assertives (n=76). Another instance involved justifying cultural nuances in business communication: "Penggunaan bahasa sopan dalam proposal bisnis mencerminkan nilai gotong royong kita, yang terbukti meningkatkan kepercayaan mitra" (The use of polite language in business proposals reflects our value of mutual cooperation, proven to build partner trust), blending truth with contextual justification.

Directives reinforced procedural epistemic norms, particularly justification, by instructing students to apply evidence-based practices. A common form was: "Susun argumen proposal Anda dengan minimal tiga sumber referensi terverifikasi!" (Construct your proposal arguments with at least three verified reference sources!). These accounted for 47% of directives (n=50), promoting accountability in professional scenarios like debate simulations. However, 25% of directives (n=27) were purely managerial, such as "Diam dan catat poin utama" (Quiet and note the main points), with limited epistemic depth.

Interrogatives showed moderate epistemic potential, split between display questions (65%, n=55) for recall/testing and open-ended probes (35%, n=29) for inquiry. Display examples included: "Apa elemen utama dari struktur paragraf persuasif?" (What are the main elements of a persuasive paragraph structure?), eliciting factual responses without extension. In contrast, open probes fostered critical inquiry, e.g., Lecturer B asking during a group debate: "Mengapa data statistik ini lebih meyakinkan daripada anekdot pribadi? Berikan alasannya" (Why is this statistical data more convincing than personal anecdotes? Provide reasons), which prompted student justifications and appeared in 36% of interrogatives (n=30). IRF sequences dominated, with lecturer feedback often closing rather than expanding epistemic dialogue.

Expressives, though rare, highlighted epistemic virtues like curiosity: "Bagus, Anda berhasil mengkritik asumsi itu dengan bukti yang solid" (Good, you successfully critiqued that assumption with solid evidence), praising justification in 50% of cases (n=4). Interviews with lecturers corroborated these patterns; both noted intentional use of assertives for "modeling truth in real-world tasks" but cited time constraints (90-minute sessions with 30 students) as limiting deeper inquiry, estimating only 20-30% of class time for open discussion.

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Quantitative summary of epistemic embeddings:
- Truth: 45% of assertives (n=82), 12% of overall utterances.
- Justification: 47% of directives (n=50), 39% of interrogatives (n=33).
- Critical Inquiry: 35% of interrogatives (n=29), 18% of assertives (n=33 via embedded questions).

These results indicate epistemic values are transmitted foundationally but unevenly, with vocational relevance (e.g., reports, debates) amplifying justification over pure inquiry.

DISCUSSION

The predominance of assertives and directives in lecturer speech acts at Politeknik Ganesha Medan reflects a hybrid pedagogy blending traditional authority with vocational pragmatism, IRF model and observations of teacher dominance in resource-constrained settings. Assertives effectively embed truth and justification, modeling epistemic standards essential for polytechnic students preparing for industries like engineering in North Sumatra's manufacturing sector. For instance, utterances tying language to "data primer" (primary data) align with Kuhn's (2010) advocacy for evidence-based argumentation, fostering professional epistemic literacy. However, their monologic tone may limit student agency, echoing (Simaremare et al., 2024) concerns about epistemic injustice in hierarchical environments, where Medan's multicultural students (e.g., from Batak backgrounds valuing communal harmony) might hesitate to challenge lecturer claims due to cultural deference.

Directives' focus on procedural justification supports curriculum goals for communicative competence as seen in instructions for "referensi terverifikasi" (verified references), which prepare students for workplace tasks like proposal writing. Yet, the managerial subset risks performative compliance, reducing epistemic engagement to task fulfillment rather than genuine exploration—a pattern noted in Indonesian vocational studies (Saputro et al., 2021). This is exacerbated in polytechnics by class sizes and dual emphases on theory and practice, where lecturers, as interviews revealed, prioritize efficiency amid job market pressures in Medan.

Interrogatives offer the strongest potential for critical inquiry, with open probes facilitating dialogic turns akin to uptake strategies. The 35% open-ended rate suggests emerging progress toward epistemic virtues like curiosity, particularly in debate activities that simulate professional scenarios. However, the dominance of display questions perpetuates rote recall, mirroring (Rahmi Nopriani, Rini Afrilesa & English, 2023) findings in urban Indonesian education and (Yang & Jansem, 2025) analysis of constrained turn-taking in non-Western contexts. In Medan's diverse setting, this may inadvertently marginalize epistemic contributions from less vocal students, undermining equity.

Overall, epistemic values are enacted unevenly: robust in truth and justification for vocational applicability but weaker in inquiry, comprising only 32% of interactions. This aligns with (Suryadinata, 2022) critique of Confucian-influenced Asian pedagogies favoring harmony over critique, adapted to Indonesia's post-reform landscape. Lecturer interviews highlight intentionality—e.g., linking speech acts to "real-world truth"—but structural barriers like session length hinder depth, suggesting a need for targeted interventions.

Implications for Politeknik Ganesha Medan include faculty training in facilitative speech acts (e.g., Socratic extensions) and curriculum adjustments to allocate time for epistemic reflection, potentially enhancing student outcomes in employability and critical thinking. Regionally, these findings underscore North Sumatra's vocational challenges, such as integrating ethnic diversity into epistemic practices. Limitations, like the small sample, suggest caution in generalization, but the multimodal data provide robust insights.

Future research could employ mixed methods, incorporating student surveys on perceived epistemic gains or longitudinal tracking of speech act evolution post-training, to deepen understanding of epistemic development in Indonesian polytechnics.

CONCLUSION

Examining lecturer speech acts at Politeknik Ganesha Medan reveals that epistemic values are variably enacted in Indonesian language interactions, with assertives and interrogatives advancing truth and inquiry, while directives prioritize structure over autonomy. This supports vocational communication but highlights the need for more equitable epistemic practices to prepare students as reflective professionals.

Policy suggestions encompass lecturer development in dialogic methods and curriculum integration of epistemic objectives. Strengthening these values can elevate polytechnic education, contributing to Indonesia's skilled workforce. Subsequent studies might investigate long-term epistemic impacts or incorporate digital learning tools.

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