THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' LEARNING STRATEGY AND STUDENTS' ENGLISH ACHIEVEMENT TO THE EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS OF SMPN H. WUKIRSARI

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Abstract: Speaking has been put in a high priority as far as English language mastery is concerned. It is widely used as a measurement for language achievement at not only schools but also companies. In particular cases, however, speaking is viewed as a more demanding and threatening skill compared to listening, reading, and writing as it is a product of a language learning process rather than simply language learning (NCLRC, 2004). This research was aimed to figure out classroom activities which play a vital role in the teaching-learning process as it is through these that students acquire, learn, and practice the skills. The subjects of this research were the speaking class students. This research was a descriptive qualitative. Based on the research, it was found that since speaking skills are vital for students to learn, we – teachers of English - have to make every endeavor to help students master them. Classroom activities are parts of language learning process that we can handle and design to meet the above needs. With appropriate activities within stimulating classroom environment, it is expected that we can provide triggers for our students to speak.

Keywords: *Speaking, Classroom Activities, Learning Process*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking has been put in a high priority as far as English language mastery is concerned. It is widely used as a measurement for language achievement at not only schools but also companies. In particular cases, however, speaking is viewed as a more demanding and threatening skill compared to listening, reading, and writing as it is a product of a language learning process rather than simply language learning (NCLRC, 2004). Moreover, learning speaking means learning and practicing the language and the language use, as well as embracing a variety of other aspects beyond the language itself.

Due to this complexity, a lot of learners' experience difficulties in learning to speak. When asked about the causes, they often come up with various reasons covering not only language but also non-language aspects. For Indonesian learners, in general, such factors as grammar, vocabulary limitation, pronunciation, speech variation, fear of making mistakes are mostly cited as the inhibiting factors.

Beare (2009) moreover, identifies a number of factors causing this, including the tendency of the learners to translate their native language into English and the attempt of the learners to find specific words or phrases to express their ideas. Other crucial factors pointed out are nervousness, and lack of both confidence and practice. Davis (2009), however, notes that most learners do not realize this complexity and only blame their vocabulary limitation as for their major problem. As language teachers, consequently, we have a great duty to assist our learners facing their problems and equip them with necessary skills required for conducting oral communication.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Unlike other skills of English taught at schools and universities, speaking has its own distinct characteristics. Richards (2009) cites the complexity of spoken interaction not only in the first but also the second language by discussing Luoma's identification on features of spoken discourse. These include the composition of ideas, the use of vague and generic words, utilization of fillers and hesitation markers, the occurrence of slips and errors reflecting on-line processing, and the existence of variations (formal vs informal, social and cultural dependence) and the like.

Similarly, NCLRC (2004:2) point out the features and categorizes them into three different areas of speaking knowledge that needs to be concentrated on; namely:

1. Mechanics (pronoun, grammar, vocabulary);

2. Functions (transaction or interaction); and

3. Socio and cultural rules and norms"

Regarding the functions of speaking, furthermore, Brown and Yule (in Richards, 2009) differentiate three versions of talk that need to be approached differently. They are: *talk as an interaction, talk as a transaction,* and *talk as a performance* that needs to be approached differently.

Talk as **interaction**, according to Richard (2009) is what generally known as a daily conversation - the one performed as social functions. Thus, greeting one another, carrying out small talk and chit-chat, talking about one's hobbies or routine activities, as well as discussing current activities, for instance, belong to this category. Some talk is performed in a casual way, some others, on the other hand, are more formal. The features of this type involve, among others, the inclusion of relationship, social function, and degree of politeness. As a result, skills on how to open and close conversations, choose a topic, interrupt, take a turn, ask and give small information, etc. are important to be focused on.

Secondly, talk as **transaction** deals with situations where speakers have to make themselves unmistakably understood. In this type of talk, the message is the most crucial

element and skills, accordingly, should be concentrated on the way to get the message across although it does not always be accompanied by accuracy. Richards goes on by giving an example of this kind of talk: asking for direction, asking for a particular thing in a shop, ordering food, making a telephone call, discussing a plan, and the like. Thus, the skills needed in transaction talk are: explaining an intention, describing something, agreeing disagreeing, clarifying and confirming information.

The last version of the talk, talk as ***performance***, refers to talk in public, for instance, giving an announcement, speech, reporting, etc., which is, generally, in the form of a monolog. It is the impact of this talk which becomes the central point, and it involves skills to use appropriate opening and closing, present information in certain sequence, employ appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar and pronunciation, and maintain audience attention.

Knowing the type (or types) of talk to teach will certainly help teachers to determine the skills that the students need to be equipped with. What skills to address and how they are addressed are the next steps that need to be carefully designed, arranged and given in a series of classroom activities.

To develop activities that enable learners to conduct real-life communication, therefore, NCLRC (2004) suggests instructors provide activities closer to authentic communication. In spite of using drills on asking and answering questions in a structured and predictable way, teachers are advised to design practice involving information gap in which learners have to Mansour erratic questions with various answers. In this way, learners are likely to employ strategies to ask for further information, clarification, and understanding – a situation that reflects the real communication.

Apart from the above, Sasson (2007) views speaking from another important aspect of oral language. After observing groups of people conducting a talk for performance, he points out that speaking skills can be improved by first, fostering learners' motivation, or what refers by Ali (2010) as "enthusiasm", and second, effective teaching. Motivation or enthusiasm is, in fact, able to combat the nervousness and low confidence that a speaker may have so that it will gradually ease his/her pressure in carrying out conversations.

Referring to the above discussion, teaching speaking as either a foreign or second language is, a very complex task to be implemented. Speaking teachers need to concentrate on more than language matters. It appears that non language aspects such as motivation and confidence need to be taken into account in their teaching to help improve learners' ability to speak. The challenge for us, teachers of English, therefore, is to wrap all of the skills required into a series of meaningful classroom practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Like other English skills, teaching speaking in the classroom involves inevitably various elements ranging from materials, tasks, teacher support, to activities. In this paper, however, I will restrict the discussion on one element only; namely, speaking activities.

Classroom activities play a vital role in the teaching-learning process as it is through these that students acquire, learn, and practice the skills. In line with what Richard (2009) discusses, speaking activities given in the classroom has to be in line with the purpose or function of the teaching and the area where students are prepared for. Thus, first of all, teachers have to know what functions of talk need to be covered in their classroom: whether it is for interaction, transaction, performance, two of them, or even all. The determination of this will enable teachers to focus on the skills involved and optimize learners' ability in mastering the skills required.

General Description of My Speaking Classes

The particular speaking classes I want to discuss in this paper are the ones in the English Education Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Bogor, West Java. The subject I teach is Speaking III, the continuation of Speaking I and II. Speaking I concentrate on General English covering greetings, self-introduction, and survival English, while Speaking II focuses on English in Professional Context 1; for instance, English at hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and the like. Speaking III, additionally, continues the previous subject; thus, it covers such topics as health, business, television, entrepreneurship, etc. It is worth noting that the curriculum including the topics is set by the Head of Study Program, but the classroom implementation is left to the teachers. Generally, I have three classes (of 8 classes) to take care of, each of which comprises approximately 14 students. One major thing that needs to be assured of in this case is that all students in all 8 parallel speaking classes will obtain more or less the same material.

Activities at the Beginning of the Teaching Process

As future teachers, the students I teach have to be equipped with all versions of talk discussed by Richards. Activities ranging from greeting students, building a relationship and interact with students, asking and giving information to monolog talk are viewed to be crucial for these students. Hence, the activities given in the classroom are tailored to these needs.

I am one of those who is of the opinion that first impression will give essential impact; therefore, I always use some part of my first lesson meeting to build a relationship with my students. Since I have never met the students in my speaking class before, I always commence the activities by arranging students to sit in a circle or U shape and having a general small talk with them. After mentioning my name, I let my students, in turn, introduce themselves and sometimes answer general questions from either their friends or me. In this occasion, the skills that students carry out is giving information about themselves. When all students have their turn, I move to another skill in speaking; namely, asking for information in which students are given time to know more about me by asking questions. Besides providing an opportunity for students to interact, I use this particular time to know not only my students' current level of English but also their weaknesses that need to be improved.

Raising students' motivation is the next errand. Immediately after this introduction, I raise the issue of the importance of English to be discussed together. Questions like "Why do we take English?", "is English important for us?" What advantages will we get with our English?" , or "What will we do after finishing our study?" are often forwarded. Students will usually give responses to these questions. To the students who do not, I change my

"information" questions into "yes/no" questions or guide them to express their ideas. Positive response and words showing rewards usually accompany my feedback.

With this kind of activity, it is intended that in their first meeting, students can start building opinions about their new class, new classmates, and new teacher, and get the impression that their new environment is not intimidating but supporting them. A further consequence of knowing this, is that students will find out their motivation and gain their confidence in practicing their speaking.

Other Activities

The following meetings are designed to improve both the learners' confidence and their ability to speak gradually. I view both of them as vital aspects since I am of the opinion that when students are confident, it will be easier for them to explore their potential or knowledge they have learned. Pair and small group activities are then chosen since talking to friends are observed to be less intimidating than to the teacher directly, particularly when the topic of the conversation is new. Thus, placing students in a pair and a small group is an attempt to lessen students' nervousness in one end and to assure that every student is able to take part in a speaking activity on the other. In some cases, I intentionally arrange the students' partner(s) in order to mix students with different levels of ability. To ensure that every student in the group takes an active part in the assignment given, I ask the leader (generally the one with high competence) to "train" his/her members to speak on a given topic.

In addition, conducting practices in a pair or small group allow a variety of communication skills to practice. Besides giving and asking information, students will unintentionally practice skills in taking a turn, asking for clarification, using fillers and hesitation markers, as well as playing roles.

The activity conducted after several meetings is a free presentation where students are asked to talk about a product or service to offer. Upon the completion of this five-minute presentation, students are required to answer two or three questions from their friends about the topic delivered. This activity is intended to bridge the mastery of skills from the transaction version to performance one; the latter version will be more developed in Speaking IV. The purpose of this activity is not as demanding as the one in the performance version but to enhance students' confidence to carry out a specific task individually and to manage their own talk. Practice on this can eventually drive students to prepare more to become an independent speaker.

Another activity employed approaching the end of the semester is impromptu speaking. In this activity, topic is not announced in advance but given right at the day of the lesson. This activity is meant to observe students' readiness to carry out "on the spot" conversation or talk – this is why this is such activity is given after the tenth meeting when, hopefully, students' confidence has been stronger than it was when students are in the first meeting.

CONCLUSION

Since speaking skills are vital for students to learn, we – teachers of English - have to make every endeavor to help students master them. Classroom activities are parts of language learning process that we can handle and design to meet the above needs. With appropriate activities within stimulating classroom environment, it is expected that we can provide triggers for our students to speak.

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