

Improving Students' Speaking Skill through Communication Game, Recorded Role Play and Peer Feedback

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This study aims to improve students' speaking skills using the combined strategies of communication game, recorded role play and peer feedback activities. This action research took place at an English institution in Jakarta, Indonesia and collected the data by observing the learning process with the collaborator, analyzing the video during the class, making field notes, conducting tests (pretest and post test) and interviewing students. There were three cycles in this study. Results of the tests showed that students' speaking skills improved. The mean score of pre-test was 3.1, while the mean score of post-test in cycle one was 3.3, cycle two 3.5 and cycle three 3.6. Based on the interview, all students were interested in and excited about the use of the three strategies above. However, there was a problem with the implementation of peer feedback activities; it was time consuming. The results of this study can not only promote an idea for EFL teachers to use the strategies as an alternative approach to teaching speaking skills but also inspire EFL teachers to be more creative in using these three strategies.

Keywords: communication game, recorded role play, peer feedback, speaking skill

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa dengan menggunakan strategi pembelajaran gabungan, yaitu communication game, role play yang direkam and peer feedback. Penelitian tindakan ini dilaksanakan di sebuah institusi pendidikan bahasa Inggris di Jakarta, Indonesia dan pengambilan data dilakukan melalui pengamatan proses belajar yang dilakukan bersama dengan rekan peneliti, menganalisa video ketika kelas berlangsung, pencatatan lapangan, test (awal dan akhir) and wawancara. Ada tiga putaran (cycle) yang dilakukan dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan berbicara siswa meningkat. Nilai rata-rata tes awal adalah 3,1, sedangkan nilai rata-rata tes akhir di putaran pertama adalah 3,3, putaran kedua 3,5 dan putaran ketiga 3,6. Berdasarkan hasil wawancara, semua siswa tertarik dan senang dengan penggunaan tiga strategi di atas. Namun ada masalah yang muncul ketika menerapkan peer feedback, yaitu menyita waktu yang lama. Hasil dari penelitian ini tidak hanya memberikan gagasan kepada guru-guru bahasa Inggris untuk menerapkan strategi pengajaran yang sama, tetapi juga memberikan inspirasi kepada mereka agar lebih kreatif dalam menggunakan ketiga strategi pengajaran tersebut.

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INTRODUCTION

As one of the basic language skills, speaking requires communicative competence along with pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and comprehension skill. Teaching speaking may become a difficult task for teachers as they face not only students' problems but also other problems. Students may feel unmotivated during the learning processes. This also happens to students learning English in non-formal education. For example, they feel too tired after work. Another problem can be from the learning environment; for example, the students in one class may have different level of speaking ability. Therefore, providing them with more exciting and fun way of teaching speaking may bring a good impact for them.

Based on my experience teaching conversation classes at one of English language courses in Jakarta, Indonesia, exciting and fun ways of teaching speaking are rarely conducted. This may be because the majority of students participating in this conversation class are employees and university students who are considered adults, so that teachers think that adult students prefer 'serious' activities. Few teachers use mixed teaching techniques, combining fun and serious activities once in a while; however, they are done for the sake of avoiding boredom or 'killing' spare time. They will not apply the activities continuously as they are required to finish the materials in the textbook. Besides this, most teachers think that the model dialogs in the textbook are very important to skip. This, however, makes them tend to teach the materials monotonously in the classroom and rely on the coursebooks. That is why a study investigating how adult students can improve their speaking skill and how they will respond if taught using different learning techniques needs to be conducted. This is also a response to what McKay and Tom (1996) states that adult learners also have different learning style in which some of them are comfortable watching and listening, while the others like taking notes. A study which accommodates adult learners' learning style is worth conducting.

Responding to the problems above, I am interested in conducting a study using exciting and fun activities in promoting students' speaking skill. To this end, the combination of communication game, recorded role play activities and peer feedback are adopted. The use of communication games is to give the students more enjoyable atmosphere to learn English in the classroom. The use of recorded role play activity aims to give students good opportunity to practice speaking with a good facial expression and pronunciation, while peer feedback activity aims to give students a chance to check their speaking performance after having a role play activity. Using the combination of those three strategies is expected to be able to improve students' speaking skills.

Some studies using the three strategies above have been conducted in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Hidayat, 2013; Liu & Lee, 2013; Oradee, 2012). Results of the studies show that the strategies give very positive contributions to students' language improvement.

Hidayat (2013), for example, conducted classroom action research using game-based leaning (GBL) to teach speaking skill. Check lists and questionnaire used to collect the data, according to Hidayat, showed that GBL application in the classroom could make a difference in the way students responded to the lessons; they were always excited and highly-motivated

during learning activities.

Oradee (2012) conducted a study aimed to investigate students' speaking skills and their attitude towards the teaching of speaking skills using three communicative activities. 49 students categorised into high, medium and low speaking proficiency level participated in the study. Based on the quantitative data, speaking pre-test - post-test and students' attitude towards teaching English speaking, and qualitative data, a learning log, a semi-structured interview and a teacher's journal, Oradee concluded that students' English speaking abilities after being taught using communicative activities improved, and they had good attitude towards teaching English speaking skills using communicative activities.

Liu and Lee (2013) investigated the influence of various forms of peer observation and feedback on students' learning improvement in Taiwan. They asked students to learn the contents of lesson and complete homework assignments through online peer assessment activities. Results taken from interviews and students' journals, according to Liu and Lee, showed that even though students complained about unspecific feedback, they had positive attitudes towards the peer feedback and adjusted their homework following the feedback of their classmates. The positive learning interaction also happened. For example, when the classmates did not understand their work, students rewrote it to make it more understandable.

The studies above have shown that communication activities and peer feedback give very positive effects on students' learning; however, the studies only focused on one strategy. Besides, the studies were conducted at formal institutions. Therefore, the combination of those strategies plus role play need to be explored to further find what the strategies can play to contribute to the teaching of speaking skill. This study answers the challenge and takes place at non formal education.

METHODS

This study was conducted at a language institution in Jakarta, Indonesia for three months. The participants were adult students taking a conversation class level three. This level was approximately equivalent to pre-intermediate level. This was classroom action research (AR), and there were at least two main reasons why AR was adopted. Firstly, I was interested to see theories in relation to my own practice in the classroom. Secondly, I wanted to find solution to the problems faced by most students in which even though they were already at the level three, their speaking skills were still unsatisfactory. The AR in this study adopted Kemmis' model (as cited in McNiff, 1992). The study did three cycles, each of which consisted of such stages as planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

In the planning stage for the first cycle, I reviewed the learning programme, learning media, working sheets for students, observation sheets, questionnaires and evaluation test. The lesson plan was also designed to get the most successful learning achievement. In conducting this study, I collaborated with a colleague at the institution.

In the acting stage, the combination of communication game, role play and feedback activities were conducted in the three cycles consisting of three meetings for each cycle. Each meeting was conducted for 90 minutes. In the first cycle, I gave pre-test by asking students

to give one-minute presentation, to make a brief conversation of introducing people and to make a small talk. Then, I gave warming up activities to the students by providing them with communication game. Giving the communication game in the very beginning of the lesson aimed to boost student's attention and motivation during the learning processes. The games were selected based on the related materials in every meeting, and they were, among others, scream and write game, interview activity, call me my bluff and mime game. Scream and write game was the modification from 'Simon say' game and intended as an ice-breaking game for the students to start the class. After that, I stated learning objective, gave presentation, grouped the students, video recorded their performance, made conclusion and gave post-test.

In the observing stage, I observed students' participation in learning processes and investigated what went wrong and right. In the final stage, reflecting, I evaluated and discussed the results of the observation with the colleague. The results would be the consideration for the next cycle.

Some methods were applied to collect the data: observation, field notes, interview and pre-test & post-test. The interview was conducted after each cycle to find how the students responded to the use of combination of communication game, recorded role play activities and peer feedback. The data obtained were transcribed, categorised, analysed and interpreted to answer the research objective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

As mentioned, this study did three cycles, and each cycle consisted of at least two meeting sessions. In the first cycle of meeting one, there were some findings. First, the class was ineffective. Students only paid attention to the teacher without any active meaningful participation. However, at the end of presentation stage, there was some argumentation on the quiz, and it made the class alive. Second, the students found some difficulties in understanding my instruction. For the practice stage, I asked them to have a chain dialogue game. They were asked to sit in a circle and face their friends. I wanted them to make a short introduction. The introduction had to be responded so that a dialogue could happen. Again, they seemed to have difficulties in understand the instruction on how to play this game, thus I explained in detail and gave them examples how to do it. Third, some grammatical mistakes were also found during the practice and the assessment stage.

In the meeting two, I started the class by giving them a feedback form and asked them to fill out the form with scores on whatever they saw from the video. Then I gave them another activity, ball question game, to boost their motivation to study. All they needed to do was only thinking a question and asking the question to their friends while throwing the ball. The question had to be answered right after the ball was caught. After that, I asked the students to do some exercises on their student book. At the assessment stage, I asked them to record their role play activities. Based on my observation, some grammatical mistakes were also found during the practice and assessment stage, and some students had difficulties in finding correct expressions or vocabularies.

During the third meeting of the first cycle, I started the class by distributing feedback forms and explained to students again how to give feedback to their friends' performance because one student was absent in the previous meeting. In the practice stage, I asked the students to make a U-shape sitting arrangement and asked them to work in groups consisting of four to five students in one group. I asked one member of the group to introduce him/herself. Another member who introduced him/herself had to mention the information of previous student. After that, I asked the students to do some exercises on their student book and asked them to do a recorded role play activity for their post-test after finishing the first cycle. Some problems emerged from this meeting: too much teacher's talking time, passive participation, lack of student interaction, too much time spent to fill out a feedback form and some grammatical mistakes. Based on the students' performance in the cycle one, I and my colleague discussed what was still unsatisfying and did some changes in cycle two.

In the first meeting of the second cycle, I started the class by showing a picture related to the lesson. Then matching game was given; each group got a set of pictures and cards and had to find the correct words matching the pictures. In the presentation stage, I interactively explained expressions and vocabularies using word cards, while in the practice stage, I asked the students to work in pairs to do an 'arrange and say' game. The students were asked to arrange the dialog based on the tape. In the assessment stage, students work in pairs to create and perform a dialog about asking and giving direction. Based on the findings of the observation stage, two interesting things emerged. Firstly, sometimes the students still used Indonesian to communicate in the classroom, and secondly, there were many humorous things made by the students that helped them create fun and relaxed atmosphere during the learning process.

During the second meeting of the second cycle, I asked students to play with a map by asking and answering questions based on it, to play a PowerPoint game on giving & asking direction and to tell a story game using comic strips. I interactively re-explained the expressions, gave some exercises using PowerPoint slides and asked the students one by one to answer the questions. For the assessment stage, students worked in pairs to create a dialog about asking and giving direction. Findings of the observation stage showed the following points. Firstly, the students still used Indonesian to communicate in the classroom. Secondly, students realized that the map was the new one. Finally, I found that when giving students communication games which needed physical movement, they felt happy and the class was more alive.

Based on the reflecting stage conducted by the researcher and collaborator, there were some emerging points. First, the collaborator thought that the teacher did not state the learning objective to the students. Second, the collaborator thought that the teacher had already reduced the teacher's talking time by adding more challenging activities to promote student-student interaction in every stage of learning processes. The teacher also gave more time for students to respond in every question. Finally, students thought that it was easier to fill out the peer feedback form. They could do it in a short time, thus they wouldn't feel bored in the classroom.

In the first meeting of third cycle, I still used communication games to boost students' motivation. I reviewed the previous role play performance by asking them to fill out the peer feedback form. In the practice stage, I asked students to play a charades game. This type of

game asked students to guess an activity mimed by another student. There was a problem found during the observation stage: some students still had problems in understanding my instruction on how to do the charades game.

In the second meeting, I asked them to review the previous topic by playing a categorizing game. Students reviewed some expressions on the topic using cards. I gave several cards and they had to categorize them into making, receiving, transferring, or changing appointment expressions on the board. They really enjoyed the game. In the presentation stage, I gave students video to present the topic. I showed the video on how to make, receive, transfer and change appointments. I asked students to sit back with their friends and retell everything they had seen from the video to their partners. Then they had to act out the same dialogue, but they were allowed to improvise the dialogue. During the reflecting stage, there were some points which emerged. Firstly, the collaborator thought that promoting speaking techniques in the classroom was already successful enough. Those techniques needed to be implemented in other conversation classes in order to engage the students' motivation in learning English, especially speaking. Six out of seven students informed that a recorded role play was the most challenging activity. One of the students said that a communication game was the most interesting classroom activity.

As mentioned, this study used test and interview. Two tests were assigned to the students during the learning process. The pre-test was given in the first meeting, and the post-tests were conducted at the end of every cycle to measure their understanding of the lesson given. The data revealed that the mean score of pre-test was 3.1. The mean score of cycle one was 3.3, cycle two 3.5 and cycle three 3.6. This shows that the use of combined strategies were successful in improving students' speaking ability.

With regard to the interview, it was conducted twice: after the first cycle and at the end of cycle three to find students' responses to the use of combination of communication game, recorded role play activities and peer feedback in a conversation class. The results of interview showed that all students were interested in and excited about those techniques. Besides this, they needed a comfortable place to study.

Discussion

Based on the data obtained from observation, field notes, tests and interview, it was found that conversation class students expected to have interesting and challenging speaking activities to improve their speaking skill. To deal with that, the teacher needs to be as creative as possible to provide language exposure and reinforce students' speaking skill. Since this study shows that the combination of three strategies above could encourage speaking skill, applying these techniques can be one of the alternatives to use in the EFL classroom, especially in the teaching of speaking.

The study found that even though some students got difficulties to deal with particular game, they still enjoyed it. They finished every game by showing a happy face. Students learned and spoke without feeling stressful. This shows that the application of communication game in increasing the students' speaking skill was quite successful. The finding of this study is in line

with the previous research done by Hidayat (2013).

Harmer (2007) argues that some main reasons to speak in the classroom are to provide opportunities, practices and feedback for both teachers and students. Regarding the statement, this study shows that communication game activities provide opportunities for students to speak and practice their English. Besides, this students can practice spontaneous conversation, for example, through asking and giving direction. Harmer (2007) also comments that communication games help students learn English with fun and help them talk more quickly and fluently. The findings of the study support the statement. For instance, through a ‘play ball’ game, students had to talk quickly to respond to the question asked by their friends.

Findings of this study show that communication game can be applied in the EFL classroom and can help students increase their capability in speaking English. The game may also raise up students’ motivation to learn English. They may not easily feel bored or even sleepy in the classroom.

Regarding role play, this study found that almost all students felt that they got and learned something new in terms of speaking with role play, especially with recorded role play activities. It is new because everything they did had to be recorded. The result of the first interview also showed that 80% of the students liked this kind of activity, while the second interview showed that 71.42% of the students were for it. This finding supports what Ladousse (1995) states that a role play activity “uses different communicative techniques and develops fluency in the language, promotes interaction in the classroom and increases motivation” (p. 4).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that communication game, recorded role play and peer feedback activities can improve students’ speaking skills. This has been shown during learning processes. For instance, in the very first meeting I found some students with a low speaking ability, but now they can speak English in the average level, or at least good enough to speak English even though sometimes some of them still need more time to think of what sentence they should produce. This study in part has already achieved the goal to help students improve their English. They really enjoyed the learning atmosphere in the classroom without being afraid of making any mistakes.

The idea of providing them with more exciting and fun way of teaching speaking brings good impact for them. They felt enthusiastic and motivated enough to join whatever activities I gave during learning processes. They no longer wrote and read their dialog script in the production stage. As a result, they could pronounce the sentences well without distracting the whole conversation. Besides this, I could provide various teaching media and realias. For example, I could use PowerPoint presentation to present the material, give some games on it, play YouTube video, picture cards, word cards. Based on the interview, almost all of them liked communication game activities as they made students feel alive and awake in the classroom. With regard to role play, most of them liked recorded role play activities as the activities could force them to speak English in front of the camera. For them, it was such a challenging activity that should be continued in the next level of conversation classes. Considering peer feedback

activities which were also a kind of meaningful activities for students, the activities were a bit boring due to its duration. It took a long time for them to give comments, and they felt that they were not sure whether their score was subjective or objective enough. This may be because they do not have higher ability than their peers and may show that peer feedback could be ineffective in a certain situation.

The findings of this study can give an idea for EFL practitioners to use the combination of communication game, recorded role play and peer feedback activities as an alternative to respond to the students' difficulties in speaking skill. School teachers can also use these combined strategies or modify the strategies to encourage students to speak or promote students' speaking skill since the skill is one of important language skills which should not be neglected.

Further studies investigating these three strategies need to be conducted to see different perspectives. The studies can be done in different classes, for example, general English or English for young learners. Since this study relied more on qualitative approach, experimental study may need to be done to compare the different results if students are taught using communication game, recorded role play, or peer feedback separately.

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