

Improving College Students' Speaking Ability by Applying Communicative Language Teaching Methodology

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Abstract

Indonesia is included in the Expanding Circle Country section where English is rarely used as a foreign language. English is not used as a language of everyday communication but is used as one of the foreign languages studied at several universities in Indonesia. A phenomenon that often occurs among students when learning English is that they hesitate to practice their English in class, so it slows down their ability to communicate in English. Based on this phenomenon, the authors are interested in examining several things, including 1. Students' speaking problems in class. 2. The most effective activities in improving students' speaking ability. This research is descriptive by using a qualitative method. The data is collected by distributing several questionnaires to students and direct observation in the English class. The result of this research is 29% of participants did not want to practice English in front of the class because of fear of being a mistake and 29% of participants felt embarrassed if there is a mistake.

Keywords: Language competence, communicative language teaching, English learning, language teaching, speaking ability.

Introduction

According to Li Pei-long (2011), the communicative approach was initially used in teaching English in the late 1960s. This communicative approach is considered able to improve student speaking skills in English. So since then, English linguists have emphasized some fundamental aspects of language teaching - the potential for communicative and functional languages.

The subject of this study is 70 students of Andalas University Padang. This study is important to be conducted as speaking problems among students are still happening up to now, where some students feel afraid or shy in speaking in front of their friends. As a result, their speaking competence does not improve. In addition, the most interesting thing in this study is, in order to conduct further research, these speaking problems are able to relate to psycholinguistic studies.

The author will consequently highlight some of the causal factors and look for improvements to avoid such situations or at least to reduce the occurrence by using various speaking tips, strategies, and techniques to develop a communicative skill. In addition, a qualitative approach will be carried out in answering all these problems by investigating the students at Andalas University in Padang, direct observation in the English learning class and also by interviewing several students in order to get deepen information related to the study.

There are several studies that have been carried out related to this communicative teaching in English. First, a study conducted by Dissaya Supharatypthin (2014) examines Developing Students' Ability in Listening and Speaking English Using the Communicative Approach of Teaching. Second, Abdelghani Remache's (2016) research on Developing Students' Communicative Competence in University English Language Programs is also very interesting to discuss. Remache focused his research on the communicative competencies of students at universities in Saudi Arabia using the theory of Noam Chomsky (1965). The formulation of the problem is the importance of developing communicative competencies among students; and the implications of communicative competence in teaching and learning English. And the last one is a study by Abdullah M. A. Alhomaidan's (2014)

about The Effectiveness of Using Pedagogical Tasks To Improve Speaking Skills. In this journal, Alhomaïdan investigated the impact of pedagogical tasks on improving communication skills for students by dividing them into two groups where one group is given the task of working on pedagogical tasks and one group is not. Alhomaïdan's research subjects were 60 first-semester students at Arras College in Saudi Arabia.

Those three studies are closely related to this study. The study of Dissaya focused on listening and speaking problems of Thailand's students by using the communicative method. It is founded that the communicative method successfully improved the listening and speaking skill of Thai students. While, Remache compared linguistic competence and communicative competence and it is founded that the problem that arises among students in communicating English is their inability to express their feelings in English, besides that they assume they do not have enough English vocabulary, even though the real problem is they cannot use the vocabulary correctly. And last, Alhomaïdan investigated two groups of people in learning English. One of the groups was given pedagogical tasks and the other one was not. As a result, the group which was given pedagogical tasks had improvement on their speaking skill and the other one did not improve at all.

Thus, the aims of this research are identifying the main problem of college students in speaking practice in class and finding the best solution to improve college students speaking ability. For further research, this study is aimed at combining this study with psycholinguistics in order to know deeper problems of the college students and combining them as well in identifying a speaking error, etc.

Method

This study has looked at the level of speaking of 70 participants who are enrolled at the Economics Faculty of Andalas University Padang. All of the participants are the first semester students. Among the participants, 25 of them are males and 45 are females. All of the students have studied English since elementary school, but it is in general and their level is still low.

The main aim of this study is to analyze students' difficulties in speaking English in class and the most effective activities in improving students' speaking skill using communicative language method.

In addition, this research is qualitative descriptive. According to Kumar (2008), descriptive research includes surveys and discoveries of facts from various types of questions that arise on the surface. The purpose of descriptive research is to describe the problems that occur today and qualitatively examine the motives underlying the research by means of in-depth interviews. This type of research is usually used in research in the fields of social and business sciences.

The first stage consisted of class observation of the development of English where the author directly sits in class. During the observation, the author discovered the weakness of students in speaking. Their speaking competence is still low, it is shown from the fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. Thus, this speaking problems encouraged the author to analyze more toward the students in order to improve their English speaking ability.

The second stage is, the author distributed questionnaires to the students. After distributing the questionnaires, the author asked and explained the points on the questionnaire. Finally, the author interviewed some of the students in order to get deepen information.

The last stage is the author evaluated the questionnaires and interviewed the English lecturers in order to know how they organize the classes and materials./B

This research cycle through three processes, namely planning, implementation and reports, this is in accordance with the opinion of Mukhtar (2013: 43) that research is viewed from three parts, (1) research planning, (2) conducting research or operational research processes and, (3) research reporting. Thus, at this end of this study, English teachers will be able to identify their students' problems and learning English and able to provide qualified materials in order to motivate their speaking activities in class.

Results and Discussion

Speaking is generally considered to be the most important part of four English language skills. Indeed, one of the frustrations generally mentioned by participants was that they had spent years learning English, but still, they could not say it properly and correctly.

Speaking is one of the most difficult language skills that students face. Apart from that, it has traditionally been forced into the background while we, English teachers, have spent all the time teaching students how to write, read and sometimes listen in L2 because grammar has a long tradition of writing (Bueno, Madrid and McLaren, 2006: 321).

Generally, the practice of speaking English is a favorite activity by students. It is seen from the distributed questionnaire.

The following information shows the general characteristics of the participants of the survey:

Population: Andalus University Students

Age: 17-19 years old

Number of respondents: 70

Table 1. Gender of the participants

	Number of Participants
Boys	25
Girls	45

The table above shows the number of boys and girls who answered the survey. It is important to take into account that there is a large difference between the number of girls and boys but this does not affect this study.

Table 2. Participant's answer to the survey.

	YES	NO
1. Do you speak English with your lecturer and classmates during your English lesson?	33%	67%
2. Can you communicate in English?	74%	26%
3. Do you work in pairs or groups to do interaction activities?	84%	16%
4. Do you think your pronunciation in English is good?	57%	23%
5. Do you consider that the practices of speaking skills are useful?	86%	14%
6. Do you like speaking activities in class?	74%	26%

From survey no. 1, it is seen that 33% of participants speak English in class, while 67% do not. This is due to the different abilities of the participants. When explaining difficult theories, lecturers change English into their national language, namely Indonesian. However, when there were a question and answer session there were also participants who asked to use English, but not as many as participants who used Indonesian.

A large number of participants who did not use English in class, in contrast, to survey no, 2 where 74% of participants spoke English and 26% were not fluent in English. So, basically some participants are able to speak English but are embarrassed or reluctant to communicate in class, as the result, their speaking skills become less fluent, only limited to being able to and understand it.

One of the activities that can motivate participants to speak English in class is by having group discussion activities. Participants are divided based on their English skills, so there is no one who is the only smart, but they are mixed with those whose abilities are smarter so that those who are smarter will motivate their friends to practice speaking English in class. This activity was more experienced by participants, as seen in the survey results that 84% of participants often had group or group discussions in class.

In survey no. 4, it is seen that 57% of participants answered that their pronunciation was quite good and 23% of those who felt being laughed by their friends were not good. This speaking ability is supported by the habit of participants who like to listen to English songs on a daily basis so they are able to imitate the words in the songs they listen to.

Survey no. 5 shows that 86% of participants liked the practice of English (speaking) in class. Some of them said that the practice of speaking English was able to add to their English vocabulary. While 14% of participants did not like the practice of speaking English in class.

In survey no. 6 it is seen that 74% of participants liked the practice of speaking in class, this number was decreased from the number of participants who agreed that speaking practice was a good activity to improve their English skills. From survey no. 6 also seen, only 26% of participants who did not like speaking activities in class. This shows that not all participants who like speaking activities even though they consider that the activity is a very useful activity to improve their English language skills.

Question number 7 is “What are the reasons you do not want to or hesitate to practice English in class?” The answers are 21 participants did not like to practice conversation in class.

Table 3. Reason for not to practice English

Fear of being wrong	29%
Embarrassed if wrong / laughed at by friends	29%
self-conscious	10%
Do not like English	18%
Don't like learning theory	14%

The results of the survey above indicate that the more common causes experienced by participants who are reluctant to speak English are fear of being wrong and fear of being laughed at by their friends if they are wrong in saying words (pronunciation) which is 29%. This population was taken from 21 participants who did not like the practice of speaking in class.

Then question 8, Mention one of the learning activities that you like most to improve your English speaking skills.

Table 4 learning activities like the most

Pair work activities	19%
Roleplay	21%
Group work activities	49%
Project work	11%

From questions no. 8 it is seen that 49% of participants prefer group work activities as the best activities to improve their English language skills and followed by 21% role play and project work is the last choice for students.

All the results of the questionnaire have answered the main problems of this study. Its result is related to Richard's theory (2006) which is stated that college students as learners will learn a language through the process of communicating it in class. The result of this study showed that college students get improvement in their speaking skills by having English group work activities in class. And that speaking practice gives more improvement to their speaking ability rather than a grammar-based approach.

Conclusion

Based on the above study, the authors conclude that the causes that make students hesitant or reluctant to practice English are 29% afraid of being wrong and ashamed if 29% of friends are ridiculed/ridiculed. Although actually, the participants in the class were friends they knew well but the feeling of being wrong and embarrassed being laughed at was still present in the participants. Therefore, according to the author, the action that must be taken by the teacher is to increase participant confidence, motivate, and convince students to be more confident and not think of wrong factors in their minds

Based on the survey that has been distributed, it can also be concluded that participants prefer group work activities to improve their speaking competencies. This, with group activities, participants can support each other, correct each other and motivate each other to be more active in speaking English.

From the research that has been carried out, the author recommends that this study be developed further into the area of psycholinguistics. Therefore, the authors hope this research will give benefits to the method of teaching English for English foreign learners in the future.

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