

USING REAL-WORLD TASKS TO IMPROVE THE STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SPEAKING CLASS

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The design of this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR) which aims at knowing how high the students' participation in speaking class and how real-world tasks can improve their participation in speaking class. It is found that my students in speaking class have less participation. Deals with the problem, I employ target / real-world task to improve the students' participation in my speaking class. The subject of this study is 32 students of Intermediate Speaking class D. The tasks used are: having conversation with a lecturer, guesting native speaker, singing a song, and watching movie. I conducted the study for 2 cycles in which each cycle consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The data are observation, questionnaire, video recording and field note. The findings show that the students' participation initially is low. After doing the real-world tasks, their participation is medium. The tasks are not only foster the students' participation, but also their motivation.

Keywords: *Real-world tasks, Participation, Speaking class.*

Introduction

Participation is important to be promoted in class in order to equip students to be actively involved in learning. It allows students the opportunity to receive input from others, to apply their knowledge and to develop their speaking ability. In addition through class participation, teachers can gain a more accurate idea of how well the students understand the material being taught (Maznevski and Smith, 2006). Unfortunately, our experience shows that participation represents a major problem for many students. This matter seems ironic to take place in class in which the students major language (i.e. English). Generally, the students are more focused on the language form rather than the language use. In fact, this problem also happens in my speaking class. Obviously, it is an urgent thing to be solved since without an active participation, being able to speak will be quite impossible.

Speaking is interactive and requires the ability to co-operate in the management of speaking turns. Thornburry (2005) defines speaking is a skill, and as such needs to be developed and practiced independently of the grammar curriculum. It is in line with Harmer (2007), speaking means speak naturally without being aware much in grammar or structure of sentence. It can be said that someone who are still thinking much about grammar in his/her speaking is less capable as speaking means an ability to use words and phrases fluently without very much conscious thought. In short, having an ability to speak means being able to express idea spontaneously and naturally in a culturally manner without being aware much in grammatical rule.

Then, the challenge that is providing appropriate activities and procedures for speaking which will prepare for spontaneous interaction and which will aid the acquisition process. The activities should encourage participation from all students, require the practice of turn-taking skills, encourage longer turns, oblige negotiation of meaning, and give students practice in initiating conversations.

Based on the preliminary study, the students of mine in Intermediate Speaking class 1D still have less participation and less active in speaking class. To illustrate, they do not directly respond instruction, they ask or answer questions little, and few students gives comment or opinion. It is found that some problems faced by the students, such as: have insufficient vocabularies, lack of pronunciation, afraid of making mistake in grammar, and hesitate to participate. It could be identified from the frequency they participate in initial meeting. To illustrate, when I introduced myself and let them to ask something about me, only few students asked. Here, I focus on the

students' participation in speaking class since it is believed that participation can improve speaking ability. In this case, I propose real world-tasks to improve students' participation in speaking. Real-world tasks are authentic tasks created based on the real-world demand. It might help learners to actively participate. Also, these tasks will encounter the learners' difficulty to cope with the situation when speaking English is needed.

This study aims at knowing how high the participation of the students and how real-world tasks can improve their participation in speaking class. Participation means students' motivation and willingness to actively participate in speaking class activities. The indicators of participation are asking questions to the lecturer or students, answering questions from the lecturer or students, responding instruction, giving opinion/comment voluntarily. While, real-world tasks are tasks related to the real world demand that is tasks by practicing speaking in real situation or practicing using authentic materials. The indicators of real-world tasks are performing task, real-world construction/application. The real-world tasks here can be done in the classroom or outside the classroom without the control of the lecturer.

Task-Based Language Teaching

Language researchers today also promote task-based learning. It is an overall approach to language learning that views the "tasks that learners do as central to the learning process. The learning process is seen as a set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to curricular goals.

Nunan (1991: 279) outlines "five characteristics of a task-based approach to language learning:

- a) An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- b) The introduction of authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.
- c) The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.
- d) An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contextual elements to classroom learning.
- e) An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

There are a number of different interpretations in the literature of what a 'task' actually is. However, many researchers make an important distinction between target tasks and pedagogical tasks. The former deals with tasks which students need to accomplish beyond the classroom, while the latter deals with tasks which form the basis of the classroom activity during the instruction. Pedagogical tasks could be practiced to some extent in the classroom.

As far as target tasks are concerned, examples of the tasks are: "filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, writing a letter...making hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination...

A definition of pedagogical tasks is given by Nunan (1999:25) who refers to them as "...classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning. Successful completion of pedagogical tasks would enable students to acquire the skills needed to master real-world target tasks. For instance, a target task might be:

The learner will listen to a weather forecast and decide whether or not to take an umbrella and sweater to school.

Its related pedagogical tasks might be:

The learner will listen to an aural text about the weather and answer questions after the text whether given statements are true or false.

To sum up, real-world tasks are synonymous as target tasks. It takes place beyond the classroom that enables students to accomplish activities in the real world in everyday life, at work, play, and in-between successfully using the target language. To be able to accomplish real-world

tasks, pedagogical tasks are needed, that is classroom activity precedes the target tasks. It can be said that target tasks come after pedagogical tasks. It offers the students to cope with the functional purposes of language, then to be applied in the target tasks. Obviously, the priority is the students know the functional purposes and how to use the language. Hence, real-world tasks challenge teachers to organize classroom activities around those practical tasks that language will engage in when they are "out there" in the real world.

Real World-Task

Real-world tasks are authentic tasks related to the real-world demand in which the students will face in their life. In so doing, practicing speaking in real situation or using authentic materials is needed. Practicing speaking in real situation can be said as concept of experiential language learning. It includes activities that engage both left- and right-brain processing, that contextualize language, that integrate skills, and that point toward authentic, real-world purposes (Brown: 2001, p.238). Morris Keeton and Pamela (in Brown: 2001, p.239), proposes term of experiential learning,

"The learner is directly get in touch with the realities being studied. It is contrasted with learning in which the learner only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes in contact with them as part of the learning process...It involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it.

This technique tends to be learner-centered by nature. Examples of experiential techniques are hands-on projects (such as nature projects), computer activities (especially in small groups), research projects, cross-cultural experiences (camps, dinner groups, etc), field trips and other "on-site" visits (such as to a grocery store), role plays and simulations.

Some teacher controlled techniques may be considered experiential:

1. using props, realia, visual, show-and tell sessions.
2. playing games (which often involve strategy) and singing.
3. utilizing media (television, radio, and movies)

Those activities address the students to be centered-learner and are believed to give meaningful experience as most activities have been done in their daily. Similarly, the use of authentic materials is meaningful and important as well. Authentic material can help the students much in getting in touch with the target language because the material has been available in their surrounding.

Related to practicing speaking by using authentic materials, Nunan (1999) defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language. Gebhard (1996) gives some examples of authentic materials EFL-ESL teachers have used, they are:

- a) Authentic Listening: Viewing Materials – TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news clip, comedy shows, movies, and songs.
- b) Authentic Visual Materials: slides, photographs, paintings, children's artwork, stick-figure drawings, wordless street signs, silhouettes, and pictures from magazines.
- c) Authentic Printed Materials : newspaper articles, movie advertisements, restaurant menu, sports reports, obituary columns, advice columns, and lyrics to songs.
- d) Realia (Real world objects) Used in EFL/ESL Classrooms: coins and currency, folded paper, wall clocks, phones, Halloween masks, dolls, and puppets.

Nunan (1999) stated that it is not realistic to use only authentic materials in the classroom. He points that "learners should be fed as rich as diet of authentic data as possible, because, ultimately,

if they only encounter contrived dialogues and listening texts, their learning tasks would be difficult".

Clearly, the use of authentic materials is needed since it reinforces the students to have relationship between the language classroom and the outside world. It can be said that authentic material as the media to bridge the theory and the practice. Yet, use only authentic materials are wise until the task is also considered to be authentic.

Authentic tasks are an assignment given to students designed to assess their ability to apply standard-driven knowledge and skills to real-world challenges. In other words, a task we ask students to perform is considered authentic when, 1) students are asked to construct their responses rather than select from ones presented and; 2) the task replicates challenges faced in the real world.

Authentic tasks have several characteristics as the following:

Traditional

Selecting a Response
Contrived
Recall/Recognition
Teacher-structured
Indirect Evidence

Authentic

Performing a Task
Real-life
Construction/Application
Student-structured
Direct Evidence

Authentic tasks include tasks such as performances, products and constructed-response that typically require more direct application of knowledge and skills.

In summary, real-world tasks are tasks that are elicited from the real situation. In line with real-world tasks, some of techniques in experiential learning can be considered as real-world tasks. Also, the use of authentic materials and authentic tasks is needed as those are available in the real world. Hence, real-world tasks can be designed by employing resources in the surrounding. These tasks will equip learners to cope with the real-world situation that they will probably face at present or in the future.

Participation

Participation is a crucial element for learning. It is a proven fact that students learn better and more when they are active participants. Learning is an active process and should involve participation. Participation in class is a valuable teaching method to promote a more active involvement in learning.

A number of barriers to class participation have been found in review of the literature. Many students feel intimidated when they are asked to participate (Fassinger 1995; CELT 1998). Often the lack of self-confidence and fear that they may appear unintelligent to their peers and instructor when responding to questions or providing their point of view on a given topic and therefore feel it is easier to remain quiet (CELT, 1998). Therefore, they usually tend to be quiet. There are a number of factors affecting class participation, they are: gender instructor, students' gender and age, and cultural background.

Dealing with those barriers, the following is some strategies for improving class participation:

- a. Breaking the class into number of small groups.
- b. Better questioning strategies.
- c. Establishing and clarifying the guidelines
- d. Structured discussion

In summary, students' participation is absolutely important in order to detect initially whether the students are willing to engage in teaching learning process. Therefore, there are numerous strategies to improve participation in classroom. Those strategies have to be carefully employed to be fitted with the characteristic of the subject. In speaking, students' participation

Speak up is highly demanded in order to make the class alive. Surely they need something to be talked about. Therefore, real-world tasks are used in order to encourage them to participate and speak more in class. It can be said that these tasks bridges and reflects the tasks they will face in their life in the future. By having various experiences of real-world tasks, they are expected to be ready with the tasks in their actual life.

Research Method

The design of the study is classroom action research. This study was conducted at UMK that is located in Gondangmanis, Bae, Kudus. The subjects are 32 students of Intermediate Speaking class D, English Education Department of Muria Kudus University Academic Year 2010/2011. The data that I use are: video recording, questionnaire, observation, and field note. This research conducted in two cycles in which different tasks were employed in each cycle. In cycle 1, the task is having conversation with lecturer and guesting native speaker. In cycle 2, the task is singing a song and watching movie. Either the tasks done inside or outside classroom the participation was observed in speaking class.

Findings And Discussion

Based on the preliminary study, the students' participation in speaking class initially is at low level. After real-world tasks are implemented, the data analysis from questionnaire, field note, classroom observations, and video recording show that there is an improvement in students' participation that is at level medium. The following is result of the observation.

Indicators of participation	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Ask question	41%	50%
Answer question	19%	56%
Give opinion/comment	34%	56%

From the data analysis of the questionnaire, it is found that real-world tasks can improve the students' participation as these tasks are relevant to their life. The tasks that they do are related to their actual life. From the table above the participation is improved significantly in cycle 2. The students' participation improved particularly in answering question that is 19% to 56%. It is understandable because in cycle 2, the tasks are singing a song and watching movie. The students admit that they enjoy the task very much. In addition, they have something to discuss in class. Moreover, they like the tasks because they are interesting. Yet, about 16% of the students are not interested in the tasks. Consequently, these tasks cannot help them to improve their participation in speaking class.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, I draw a conclusion that real-world tasks are suitable to use in speaking class since it can motivate the students to speak and participate in each activity provided in class. Initially, the participation of the students is low. After real-world tasks are implemented, their participation is at the medium level. These tasks are believed to improve the students' participation since these tasks are interesting, challenging, and relevant to their life. The students find that these tasks are meaningful and can encourage them to participate in class. However, I found some obstacles in deciding the appropriate task to be still considered as real-world task as the students have less exposure of English in their daily life. They usually only use English at college, and they will not use it at home, or in informal setting. Therefore, the task is adjusted to the real environment and the students' need.

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