Virtual Class Drilling to Improve Public Speaking Skill of EFL Students in University

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ABSTRACT

The poor ability of public speaking of EFL students in university becomes barrier for them in communication especially when they talk in front of many people. This issue needs to be overcome so they will have better proficiency as public speaker. To cope this barrier, Virtual Class Drilling was applied to students in Academic Speaking class. The research question was formulated "How is the application of Virtual Class Drilling to Improve Public Speaking Skill of EFL Students in University?" The study was aimed to describe the application of Virtual Class Drilling to improve public speaking skill of EFL students in university by using action research design. Two cycles were applied in this research to 36 students of Academic Speaking class in English Education Department, Unversitas Muria Kudus. The result showed that Virtual Class Drilling significantly improved their public speaking skill with score average 72.57 categorized sufficient (63.2%) in the first cycle and it was strengthened in second cycle with better result of score average of 79.35 categorized good (82.7%). Some treatments given during the class drilling virtually (e.g., brainstorming activities for raising issue chosen, mirror rehearsal for improving verbal and non-verbal communication, and virtual peer-rehearsal) positively improved students' public speaking skill.

Keywords: Public speaking, Virtual class, EFL Students

1. Introduction

Good language skills need to be owned and learned by everyone. The abilities that students must have through learning Indonesian at school include four aspects of language skills, namely listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills. These four skills are expected to be mastered by students at a higher level. Learning English is essentially learning to communicate. Therefore, learning English is directed at improving students' ability to communicate both orally and in writing. Language consists of several communicative actions that can be studied intensively through practice, practice, and role playing. One of the important language skills taught and improved to students is speaking skill. The purpose of learning speaking skills is to train students to speak words orally politely, well and correctly, and can convey thoughts effectively in official forums or in front of many people with confidence. One must muster self-confidence, courage, and strength by experiencing all that has never been done. Every event that students go through, no matter how small, will become strength and courage in the future by trying all stages of learning through practice and practice (Novia, 2012, p.7).

Based on initial observations on the public speaking ability of EED UMK students in the Academic Speaking class, it is known that the percentage of ability to convey ideas in front of people and official forums is still low, namely 65.27. In addition, students are also still lacking

in linguistic aspects which include accuracy of speech, use of pressure, tone, and rhythm of speaking, choice of vocabulary, views, expressions, and fluency in speaking. During the speaking learning process when the researcher taught, students had difficulty expressing their ideas through questions and answers, especially in expressing comments and answers. Students are still passive and do not yet have the courage to speak. They must be pointed at the questions to answer or speak. In speaking learning such as discussion and question and answer, students have difficulty in expressing their thoughts and feelings fluently. Compiling sentences has not been effective, compiling the flow of speech has not been cohesive and cohesive. Students still think for a long time when talking, while looking at texts or notes and have not fully concentrated in developing speaking skills. This situation hinders the improvement of their speaking skills in public, so a way is needed to carry out intensive activities that lead them to improve their public speaking skills.

The selection of the Virtual Class Drilling technique is one way to improve students' speaking skills in public (public speaking). As stated by Chamot and Kupper (1989) that a learning strategy that allows students to develop competence in the target language is to use various techniques to help them understand, store, and recall new information and new skills. In addition, this technique is one of the strategies of the learning process that is integral to several language skills, such as writing, speaking, and role playing. The process of this learning activity allows students to express their ideas and abilities through the Virtual Class Drilling technique so that the learning objectives are achieved, namely improving students' public speaking skills.

2. *Public Speaking*

Speaking is one of the important skills which has to be mastered by all students. As one of the major skills needed in the world communication today, speaking emphasizes in oral performance. It is a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed. Brown (2004, p.72) states that speaking consists of some spoken components used also as the assessment. They are grammar, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and comprehension (content). Those components give a big role for non-native English speakers. According to Chaney & Burke (1998), speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning using verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts. It is a crucial part of the language learning process, and it is also the one skill, which has often been neglected in English as Foreign Language classroom. Oral performance is a priority in everyday English communication. Speaking seems intuitively the most important of all the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) since people who know a language are referred to as a 'speaker' of that language, as if speaking included all other skills of knowing that language (Ur, 1996). In other words, a learner's end product of language learning is to be capable of speaking the target language fluently. Bygate (198, p.3) explains that knowing or learning a language centrally involves being able to 'speak' it, or the common claims that language pedagogy and linguistics prioritise the study and teaching of the vernacular. Within an applied linguistic or teacher education programme, the study of speech also needs to develop an understanding of pedagogical options in promoting oral abilities. This implies developing in students a critical awareness of the range of approaches for the teaching of speaking, from the more controlled, teacher-centred approaches that are available, to the more unscripted, exploratory approaches that are being developed, in which the teacher's role is more that of setting challenges, facilitating work, monitoring progress, and providing formative and where necessary summative feedback. The important focus concerns the impact of oral tasks in channelling students towards various aspects of spoken language and their use, notably: distinct discourse patterns; distinct sets of lexico-grammatical features; distinct interaction patterns; different

modes of processing, encouraging students to concentrate as needed on the fluency, accuracy, or complexity of their speech. From the learner's perspective, speaking is the most complex and difficult task among the language skills since their preparations should include knowledge about the language and the skills involved in using it (Bygate, 1987). EFL students argue that within the four language skills, speaking ability is the one that the students thought they should improve. This what makes public speaking is important to master by students.

Public speaking is the process of delivering topics in front of more people or the audiences, whether in the classroom for students or in the certain occasion (an event or in the working place). As a student, this ability will be very useful when they need to deal with their assignments from their lecturers to be presented or shared in front of the class. The success of a public speaking is if the message delivered can be received by others clearly. Moreale et. al. (2007) state that a speech will be effective when the message conveyed and understood successfully by the audience and a speech will be appropriate when the way he or she delivers matches with the context of the speech delivery. The public speaking skill depends on the effectiveness, and appropriateness of the speaker's speech obtained from the manner or the way in delivering the message in certain setting of situation. The setting covers the situation, the target audience, the purpose of the speech, the issue, norms, and standards. The knowledge, motivation, and skills of the speaker will affect much to the successful of the speech delivery (Backlund, et. al., 2015).

3.   *Virtual Class Drilling*

Drilling was a key feature of audio-lingual method which placed emphasize on repeating structural pattern through oral drill. It has been used in foreign language classroom for many years. Tice (2004) stated that drilling is effective technique in the classroom if it is used appropriately. Some benefits can be obtained for students when the technique is applied;

1. Increasing accuracy, fluency, and complexity since the focus of the activity is more specific.
2. An intensive practice for listening and expressing certain vocabularies or phrases.
3. Build a positive atmosphere in the learning Speaking, especially for students who still have low speaking skill or confidence.
4. Correction of pronunciation will be more concerned by the students, and it makes them realize the mistake then soon improve it.
5. Students will get feedback from teachers or classmates when they produce incorrect pronunciation in discussion session.

Drills are used usually at the controlled practice stage of language learning so that students have the opportunity to accurately try out what they have learned (Matthews, et. al., 1991, p.210).

During the pandemic situation, all activities related to teaching and learning must be conducted virtually. This requires the teachers to modify the way they teach, especially in speaking. Most teaching concepts which were applied conventionally (offline) should be modified into online teaching. It means, the use of technology has important role in transferring the topic or conducting the activities. Even though online learning still becomes controversial concept, but many opinions argue the advantages of it. Gonzales (2010) state that there are some benefits found in conducting online learning. They are engaging students in online discussion, providing specific information for students and teacher, and supporting knowledge-constructing assignment.

Almost all educational level now starts to adapt with technology use in carrying out the process because it contributes a high interactive and simulative experience for students. Besides,

participants become broader since the activity has flexibility in access, distance, and medium.

4.   *Methodology*

The design used in this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR). Hopkins (1993) argues that CAR is a reflective study which has spiral cycle in doing the treatment. It begins with reflecting process on the teaching and learning activities impact which have been carried out.

Figure 1: Spiral Classroom Action Research (Hopkins, 1993)
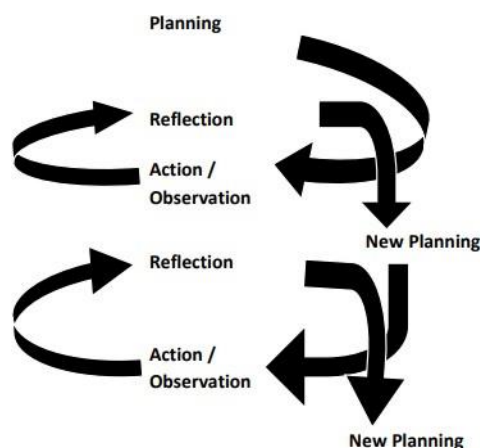
Based on the picture above, the first step in classroom action research is to carry out planning, for example creating learning scenarios, observation sheets, student activities, teacher activities and others. Then the next step is the implementation of the action. At this stage observations are made. Furthermore, doing analysis and reflection. If the method used has been successful, conclusions can be drawn, but if the method used still needs improvement, further plans will be carried out. 39 students of English Education Department, Universitas Muria Kudus became the subject of the study, and the research was conducted in Academic Speaking class in semester four.

5.   *Result and Discussion*

Research data was obtained through an oral speaking test in the form of speech performance for English Education Department students in the Academic Speaking class. The factors that are observed and assessed in improving speaking skills through speech performance are linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The assessment of the oral test observed from the language facilitator is how students use the accuracy of the pronunciation of the word, tone, and intonation, and the choice of the proper vocabularies according to the issue chosen. The non-linguistic factors observed were the content (detailed), eye contact, gestures/expressions, and fluency. Non-test assessments were carried out by observation and online interviews combined with the results of documentation. The student activities observed were the ability to build ideas, courage, creativity, and seriousness.

After doing treatment and assessment in the first cycle, the performance of students was different. There was progress even it was not much. They have better intonation and pronunciation compared with preliminary test. However, it was not significantly improved and other aspects like diction, fluency, body language still need to be drilled more. From this result, the researcher decided to continue the treatment to the next cycle. By focusing on all points such as pronunciation, intonation, diction, fluency, and body language, the treatment was done intensively. The rehearsal activity was done in peer by reviewing each other so they got feedback from their partner before checked by the lecturer and accepting further

feedback. Some are still difficult in combining the verbal production and non-verbal production. Due to this factor, students were encouraged to upgrade their understanding about the content they deliver so the verbal production such as pronunciation, intonation, and diction would be improved.

After doing the assessment in the second cycle, the performance of students was much better than the previous cycle. They had better pronunciation, intonation, and diction. Furthermore, their fluency is also improved well. Those result the increased of score average from students' speech performance. This improvement motivated them to ask more feedback dealing with their performance to make them better. Based on the interview with the students, it was gained the conclusion that they were still hard to improve their body language during the speech performance because it broke their focus in the middle of speech delivery. Besides, facing camera in delivering the speech was much more difficult than facing the real audiences in offline meeting. They were hard to focus their eye contact to the camera and to maximize face expression to support their performance.

Since the students were motivated more to get better skill and there were still some factors must be fixed, the researcher tried to achieve another better result for students' skill by doing the third cycle. In the third cycle, the treatment focused on the body language aspect to support the performance. To reach the maximum result, the treatment was done directly virtually face to face practice via WhatsApp video call. It took time, but students got comprehensive input and feedback. They should put half of their body in the frame of camera so their performance will be seen completely. After conducting intensive treatment, the assessment was done to see the result. The last activity in the third cycle resulted positive improvement. Students got better score for their better last performance in speech delivery. The students coped well with the aspects that caused the difficulties in delivering the speech after treatment was given in the third cycle.

Those progresses of students in all treatment indicate that their motivation in learning has not been gone even the learning process conducted virtually. As the result, the drilling in virtual class is able to improve students' public speaking skill. The following figure shows the improvement of their skill through score average obtained from the assessment.

Figure 2: The improvement of students' performance in every cycle
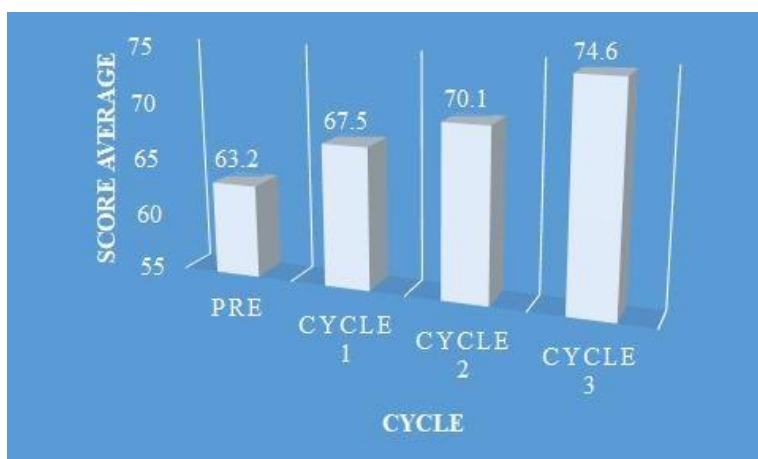
6.   *Conclusion*

Virtual class drilling becomes effective technique to keep running the Speaking class,

especially during this pandemic era. Students feel motivated and show the improvement in

Public Speaking skill, especially speech delivery. Aspects which become barriers in their performance such as pronunciation, intonation, diction, fluency, and body language have been overcome well and it affects positively their self-confidence. This could be a very prospective issue for further research to conduct study for another public speaking skill like making an effective presentation.

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