

Enhancing Speaking Ability of EFL Students through Debate and Peer Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to implement the debate technique and peer assessment to improve the third semester student's speaking ability. This study employed classroom action research and it was done in two cycles. There were four meetings in each cycle; three meetings was for the implementation of debate in the teaching of speaking and one meeting was for conducting speaking test. The instruments used to collect the data were: (1) observation checklist, (2) field-note, (3) score sheet, and (4) questionnaire. The result of the research showed that the criteria of success had been reached in cycle 2. There were two aspects determined as the success criteria; score improvement and classroom atmosphere. The result of speaking test showed that the students had made some progress, the average scores raised from 60 in pre-test, 69 in cycle 1 and 75 in cycle 2. These scores indicated that there is an increasing ability from being 'fair' to being 'good'. The classroom atmospheres were also increasing positively. The result shows that the students gradually could express their thought and opinions in debate practice. This activity encouraged the students' creativity to explore the language, since they were asked to develop their arguments from certain motions. The motions were made familiar to them so that they found it easy to speak on the topics. By practicing speaking in the debate practice, they improved their fluency as well as their confidence.

Keywords: speaking, CAR, debate, peer assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill is very important in the context of English learning. It is because through verbal language, speaking, one enables to express his/her ideas and thoughts and being able to speak is one of the indicators of mastering the language (Fauzan, 2014). According to Ur (1996:120), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak. Nunan (1999) argues that the ability to function in another language is generally characterized in terms of being able to speak that language. Considering the importance of the speaking mastery, some teachers focus on how to teach speaking effectively in his/her English class.

For the English learners, mastering speaking is a challenging since it needs a huge powerful effort. You cannot plan the exact words/sentences in speaking. Unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in real time; usually the person we are talking to is waiting for us to speak right then. We cannot edit or revise what you want to say (Bailey in Nunan: 2003:47). Speaking is about to manage the conversation and to speak spontaneously (Fauzan, 2014). Oral communication involves two or more people in negotiating meanings, and it always related to the context in which it occurs (O'Malley & Pearce, 1996:59 and Nunan, 1999:227). For the English learners, to speak English in real time, to negotiate meanings, to manage the conversation, and to speak spontaneously is the challenging issues in the English learning. Being able to speak becomes one important goal to achieve in learning English.

Many English learners feel obstacles and unsatisfied with their achievement in speaking. They faced some problem in mastering the speaking skill. The students have problems in speaking English due to reluctance, hesitation, fear of making mistakes, or lack of adequate vocabulary (Fauzan, 2014), many English learners are reluctant and unmotivated (Nunan, 1999:231-233), and EFL learners face *the students' won't talk* problem (Gebhard, 2000:186). The students do not want to speak English because they are too shy to talk in English, they are afraid of making mistakes or their friends will laugh at them, and they are also anxious because they had not many chances to speak or because the teacher always gave critics and correction on their mistakes right away (Fauzan, 2014).

The students of English department of IAIN Samarinda also faced the similar problems in speaking. Based on the researcher's experience teaching there and the preliminary study, the researcher identified some problems faced by the students. Some problems faced by the students are: many students were afraid of making mistakes, they felt nervous to speak English, their fluency and their confident were also low.

Overcoming the above problems, Ur (1996: 121-122) suggests the following strategy to overcome the speaking problems: use group work, base the activity on easy language, the language should be easily recalled and produced by the participants, make a careful choice of topic and task to stimulate interest because the clearer the purpose of the discussion the more motivated participants will be, give

some instruction or training in discussion skill, and keep students speaking the target language.

Considering the facts above, there would be a need to implement a new appropriate strategy to improve the student's speaking ability. One of the strategies that a teacher could use is debate and peer assessment. Debate is a formal method of interactive and representational argument aimed at persuading the audience. Debate can be used to teach speaking in the EFL classes. (Krieger, 2005:1) states that debate is an excellent activity for language learning because it engages students in a variety of cognitive and linguistic ways. It is providing meaningful listening, speaking and writing practice, debate is also highly effective for developing argumentation skills for persuasive speech and writing. Alasmari & Ahmed (2013:148) claims that debating can be used brilliantly to boost up students' speaking in English. The use of debate in EFL classes, the learners will first of all drive out students' fear about English language. Moreover, the debate will improve their fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary. They will also be familiar with jargons and technical terms as debating covers a variety of areas and issues.

In relation to the use of peer assessment in speaking skill, Patri (2002) investigated the agreement amongst teacher-, self-, and peer-assessment of students in the presence of peer-feedback. The research was done in the context of oral presentation skills of the first year undergraduate students of ethnic Chinese background in City University of Hong Kong. The researcher finds out that peer-feedback had helped in achieving greater correlation between teacher- and peer-assessment. Syamsulrizal (2008:45) found that peer feedback made the students aware of mistakes but they did not avoid threat or even ceased talking—as the teacher usually feared when corrections were made. Instead, the students accepted the correction and improved their speaking so that the accuracy was raised. This result can also be gained through practice and cooperative learning in which the students help one another to shape their ability. The benefit of this activity is to enable the students to assess their own ability as well as their peers or other speakers.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is aimed at implementing the debate and peer-assessment in order to solve the classroom problem in the teaching of speaking. For that reason, the classroom action research (CAR) design is chosen for this particular study since the problems to be solved come from the classroom setting. The objective of the implementation of classroom action research is to solve the problem found in the classroom setting as well as to improve the quality of teaching and learning process.

This study employed classroom action research (CAR) that follows Kemmis' cycle process (in McNiff: 1992:27): planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. In planning stage, the researcher planned the implementation of debate and peer assessment; prepared the teaching strategy, designed a lesson plan, provided media, made assessment sheet, and determined criteria of success. In the implementation stage, the researcher applied the strategy. In observing stage, the researcher collected the data. In reflecting stage, the researcher evaluated the result of the

implementation of the strategy and drew the conclusion whether the strategy was success or not by comparing to the criteria of success. The study was conducted at English Department of IAIN Samarinda in the third semester students as subject. The stages of the implementation of classroom action research in this study can be seen in Figure 1.

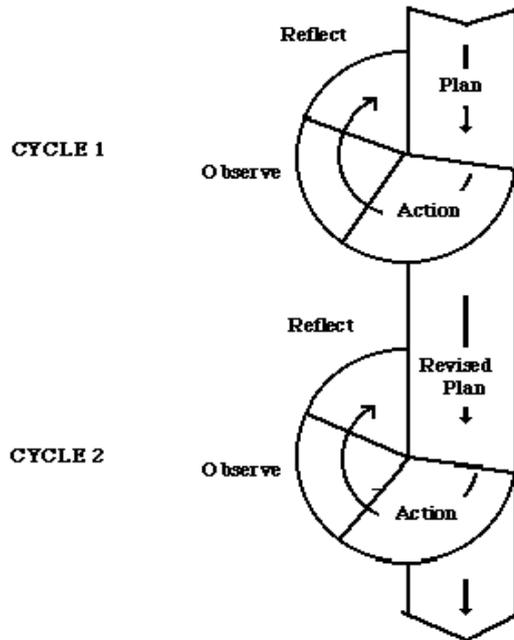


Figure 1: Kemmis' cycle action research process

3. FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented based on the result of student's observation and speaking tests gained from 8 meetings within two cycles.

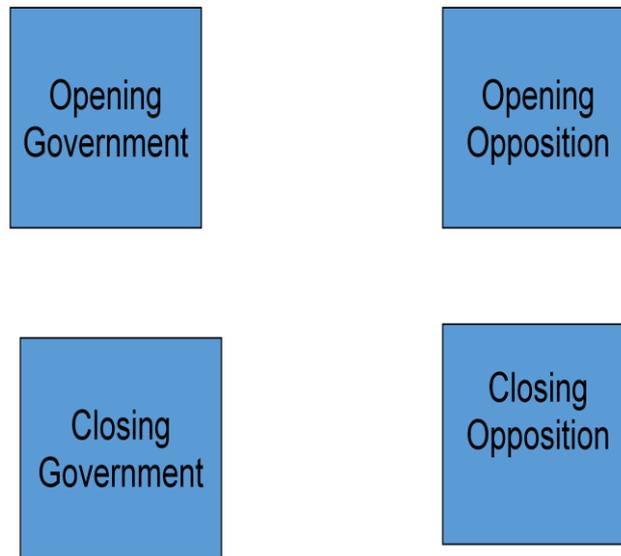
3.1 Findings of Cycle 1

The first cycle was applied in four meetings; three meetings for teaching learning process and one meeting for speaking test. The implementation was carried out in order to solve the problems the English students at IAIN Samarinda encountered which were revealed in the preliminary study and from the teacher's own experience when he taught speaking to the students. The action was implemented solely for the problems in this particular class of Speaking 3 by firstly making a plan of how doing the action. The action consisted of the teaching and learning process, the observation, the students' speaking performance, and the analysis and reflection.

The first meeting was the introduction to the implementation of debate practice for the students, which had goal to introduce the students how to perform debate practice. The class ran as usual, beginning from introducing new material and went on to the activity in which students performed debate practice in front of the class using English in speaking and ended with a review. The peer-assessment forms were

developed and introduced to the students. The activity in the first meeting was a training session in order to habituate the debate practice. They were encouraged to speak English, using whatever language they had, not to be afraid of making mistakes. Only a few of the students could speak English fluently.

The debate set-up of cycle 1 as follows.



There are four teams in practicing debate, the teams are:

1. Opening Government (Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister)
2. Opening Opposition (Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Opposition)
3. Closing Government (Government Member and Government Whip)
4. Closing Opposition (Opposition Member and Opposition Whip)

The member of debaters delivered substantive speeches in the following order: (1) Prime Minister, (2) Leader of the Opposition, (3) Deputy Prime Minister, (4) Deputy Leader of the Opposition, (5) Government Member, (6) Opposition Member, (7) Government Whip, and (8) Opposition Whip.

In the second meeting, the researcher figured out that the students were more relaxed in doing debate practice. This time they performed debate without any help from the teacher. The motion they were to deliver was *Indonesia needs a woman Leader*. Some students were unable to deliver the given motion. There was the increasing of the time allocation, but it still did not reach the time allocation. They were to assign assessment and give feedback their peers when performing the debate practice.

The third meeting was done better than the previous ones. The motion they were to deliver was *Husbands and wives should have the same educational level*. They could reduce their shyness, hesitation, and nervousness. They could improve their fluency. Each group-performer was assessed by two students. At the end of the session, they were asked to give their comment about their peers' performance. The researcher figured out that this strategy was not too successful, since not all the students made

assessment of gave any comments to the performers. It might happen because they just focus to the group debate performances.

To know the result of the implementation of debate practice, the researcher conducted test at the end of cycle 1. The result shows that the students' average score was 70.00, the highest score was 85, and the lowest score of 57. In this area of the score, the ability was qualified as 'good'. At the end of cycle 1, the researcher also evaluated the classroom atmosphere which concerned of the students' participation. The participation of students was 64%. In cycle 1, the data show that the criteria of success had not been reached yet. The implementation of debate and peer assessment has not fulfilled the criteria of success. One of the criteria has not been achieved yet is the students' participation should be 70%. The implementation of debate and peer assessment in cycle 1 was not successful yet.

The adjustment of the implementation of debate should be done to gain a higher achievement of the research in the following cycle. The improvement of the implementation of debate practice was made in several ways, they were:

- a) Choose the simpler motion
- b) Instruct the students find the data related to the motion.
- c) Give more time do rehearsal in pairs.
- d) Let the students write the outline of their arguments.
- e) Each student assesses one group only.

3.2 Findings of Cycle 2

The second cycle was applied in four meetings; three meetings for teaching learning process and one meeting for speaking test. In cycle 2, the researcher made some adjustment of the implementation of debate practice based on the reflection of cycle 1. Before implementing the debate practice, the researcher chose the simpler motions. He instructed the students find the data related to the motion, gave more time do rehearsals in pairs, and let the students write the outline of their arguments. The motion they were to deliver in cycle 2 were *Smoking should be permitted in public places*, *Government should pay for educational fee*, and *Love is more important than money*.

The adjustment of the implementation brought a positive effect. By simplifying the motion, they could do debate practice easier. By asking the students find the data before debate, they could talk more fluently since they had more information about the motion. By giving them more time preparation makes them able to conduct debate practice better. The student's peer assessment made them pay attention to the debate practice and increased their curiosity of the debate practice performed.

The positive impact of the adjustment of the implementation of debate practice in cycle 2 improved students' speaking ability. Most of the students could reach the time allocation, 7 minutes. Most of the students could give the arguments based on their roles in debate practice. In cycle 2, the researcher conducted a speaking test. There was an improvement of students' average score from the pre test, cycle 1 test, and cycle 2 test. The students' average score of pre test was 60.13, the students'

average score of cycle 1 test was 70.04, and the average score of cycle 2 test was 75,04. It means there was 20% of average score improvement.

3.3 DISCUSSION

The objective of implementation debate practice was to overcome the problems of speaking found in the English department class of IAIN Samarinda. In conducting the research, there were two components expected to be improved, they are improving the students' speaking score and increasing the quality of classroom atmosphere of teaching speaking. The result shows that the students gradually could express their thought and opinions in debate practice. This activity stimulated the students' creativity to explore the language, since they were asked to develop their arguments from certain motions. They improvised the talk spontaneously. The motions were made familiar to them so that they found it easy to speak on the topics. By practicing speaking in this activity, they improved their fluency as well as their confidence.

To foster students improving their speaking ability, the researcher made some adjustments; chose the simpler motions, instructed the students find the data related to the motion, gave more time do rehearsal in pairs, and let the students write the outline of their arguments. The result of the implementation supports the statement of Krieger (2005) that debate is an excellent activity for language learning because it engages students in a variety of cognitive and linguistic ways and Alasmari & Ahmed (2013:148) that debate can be used brilliantly to boost up students' speaking in English. The peer assessment corrected the students' mistakes and improved their speaking. The benefit of this activity is to enable the students to assess their own ability as well as their peers. This is in accordance with Patri (2002) who found that peer-feedback had helped in achieving greater correlation between teacher- and peer-assessment and Syamsulrizal (2008:45) who also found that peer feedback made the students aware of mistakes but they did not avoid threat or even ceased talking—as the teacher usually feared when corrections were made.

In learning speaking, confidence is a pivotal aspect. The students will not talk if they do not have any self confidence. Debate and peer assessment enable to enhance the students' confidence as well as their motivation. Besides the aspect of the teaching strategies implemented in the teaching and learning, there is another important aspect, it is a teacher. An English teacher has a role to become a determining aspect in achieving the successful teaching. A teacher should be a light and inspires his/her teaching. Iftanti (2015:1) states that an inspiring English lecturer is the one who could implement the teaching technique strategies and skills which is changing students' learning style.

In classroom action research, a teacher tries hard to improve the students' English skills. By implementing an appropriate teaching technique, the students' achievement as well as their motivation can be developed. In the context of classroom action research, this study supports the findings of Karsono (2014) who found that the students' speaking ability had improved after using pictures. Dealing with teaching speaking by using pictures, the students' participation made

improvement because it can reduce the students' boredom and problem in speaking. They were not shy anymore because they speak to the big group. They were enthusiastic and encouraged to learn English speaking. The students had real-life communication, authentic activities, shared knowledge and meaningful learning.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it is concluded that the debate and peer assessment can improve the speaking ability of the English department students of IAIN Samarinda: The result shows that the students gradually could express their thought and opinions in debate practice. This activity encouraged the students' creativity to explore the language, since they were asked to develop their arguments from certain motions. The motions were made familiar to them so that they found it easy to speak on the topics. By practicing speaking in the debate practice, they improved their fluency as well as their confidence. The result of speaking test presented that the students had made some progress, the average scores raised from 60 in pre-test, 69 in cycle 1 and 75 in cycle 2. These scores indicated an increasing ability from being 'fair' to being 'good'.

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