Through communicative approach to enhance students' English speaking skills in Malaysia

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Abstract

The English speaking proficiency in Malaysia students has seen a declining over the last few decades due to various factors, which makes them less competitive in the job market. Thus how to enhance Malaysian students speaking competence become a hot issue. Due to the limitation of the traditional grammar dwelling method in certain area such as oral speaking component, a new teaching approach is been introduced. Communicative Language Method, or known as CLT is the new trend in language teaching methodology.In this action research, the objective is to prepare a project launched to find out whether communicative approach will be able to enhance students' speaking skills efficiently. Both qualitative and quantitative method will be applied.

Keywords: English speaking, Malaysia, Communicative language Method, Action research, English proficiency

1. Introduction

As one of the vital aspects of language acquisition, speaking is more than important. Pragmatic, easy-teaching and up-to date, speaking embedded itself in human's all sorts of cultural action and organisation, from academic conference to daily dialogue.From the perspective of education, a good speaking skill allow students to perform better academically especially in group work in which bounds of communication and negotiation is needed to carry out a satisfactory project. And as the 21th education is shifting from teacher centred to constructivism, speaking will be playinga dominant role in the near future. To acquire speaking skills, students must acquire the competency ranging from being fluent in oral talking, a good and clear pronunciation, logical structure and enough must-know vocabulary.

Malaysian government addresses the obligatory issue that starting from 2016, all students must pass English paper in the middle secondary SPM examinations, with a minimum achievement C, as part of its Education Development Master Plan 2013-2025. The Education Ministry is expecting

all students to be proficient in speaking skills since they learned English since pre-school. Unfortunately, the reality is,students are still struggling to communicate in English although they scored well in reading and writing. According to Hetrakul (1995), students are not familiar with English as it is their second language and they tend to speak their mother tongue more often than English. Their exposure to the language remains in classand few chances have been given to practice English outside the classroom. .Lacking the chances and motivation partially lead to the gradual decline in English speaking. Besides, with the poor manage of grammar and pronunciation, they do not feel confident when speaking English and sometimes they would not even to give it a try. In other words, students learn English only to pass the examination.

Due to such condition, educators began to shift their teaching method from the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) , also known as the Communicative Approach. The incorporation of CLT method in teaching has become mandatory as it specifically helps student to strengthen their speaking proficiency. Classroom activities such as debate will no doubt be an effective method to render students involved in English speaking practising and perform quite well without letting students realise how hard the task is provided that the debate topic is interesting and students within a group could interact effectively.

1.1 Background of study

This action research is conducted in order to enhance speaking skills in English Language among low to average student proficiency. As far that we concern, Malaysia is a multiracial country as in, there are various types of races such as Malay, Chinese and Indian. Thus the current situation is that the students do not speak English for their sake as they have their own language. What's more, students tend to use Malaysia indigenous speech patterns rather than seeking for a standard global English. This issue is getting worse with the fact that students always get insufficient time in English class. In Malaysia, language class generally will be allocated five to six hours per week.

We believe that speaking is a skill that required the speaker to apply the language constantly in their daily life. Thus, this study focused on how to boost confidence in speaking English among Malaysian students with hope to improve their competence.

1.2 Problem Statement

English is the most wild spread and accepted language all over the world. English has been emphasising even more frequent following the development and prosperity of transportation and technology as it can serve as the global language to benefit global trade market, international

education interaction, etc. According to Kitao (1996) English has been widely accepted as the most widespread language used in the world due to its primitive position. Thus, fluent and effective speaking competence can be regarded as the core to successfully fulfil the function and objective of English as a global language.

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language. Learning English in Malaysian formal classroom is similar and no different to learning other subjects. The formal learning of English language begins at the primary schools and continues until secondary schools. Poor proficiency particularly in speaking domain render these fresh graduates lose competence in local and international job market. And thousands of jobless unsettle young people wandering around lead up to the soaring crime rate these years. According to Si (2011) The JobStreet.com English Language Assessment test provides a standardized yardstick to measure English competency of Malaysian graduates and concluded that the graduates lack English communication skills. Ziegler (2007) also stated that lack of communication skills has been attributed toone of the the factors leading to unemployable graduates.

In response to this problem, our study proposes to investigate several options that can be done to enhance speaking skill among Malaysian students. The study will be conducted through Communicative Approach which many believe can enhance students' speaking skill. Being able to master the English speaking skill can ensure Malaysian students to have a bigger opportunity in employing a job. It is therefore very important for future generation to learn English and be able to master the speaking skills of English.

1.3 Research objective

The main objective of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of communicative approach particularly in incorporating debate for classroom activities to enhance students' speaking skill.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objective of the study, the following research questions are built:

1. Is there a significant difference between the speaking pre-test and post-testin students' speaking competence?
2. Is there a significant difference in students' speaking competence between the traditional teaching method and debate?
3. Is there a significant difference in students' speaking competence from Week 4 to Week 12?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant difference in students' speaking competence between the speaking pre-test and post-test?

H02: There is no significant difference in students' speaking competence between the traditional teaching method and debate?

H03: There is no significant difference in students' speaking competence from Week 4 to Week 12?

1.6 Research significance

The findings of this study will pay tribute in the interest of society given its enormous economic, cultural, political effect will be imposed on the world today.The great demand for the Malaysian graduates equipped with English background justifies the need for more approach derived from the results of this study. The approach will be able to give guidance for teachers on how to make students fully take control of their English. Administrators will be guided on what should be emphasized by teachers in the school curriculum to improve students' performance in English speaking skills. As for the students, the approach will help them to increase their English speaking proficiency that is very important to ensure them to get hired once they are graduated. For the researcher, the study will assist them to disclosure the critical area in the educational process. Thus, a new approach on learning English speaking skill must be

launched and addressed to truly benefit all the stakeholders.

1.7 Limitation of Research

The principle of conducting an serious and wild covered research requires to access Form 4 Malaysian students from all the schools, however, due to time and space constraint, full data cannot be collected, as a result, only one class with 30 students from a particular school is been chosen and observed with the approach applied on them, hence the result we found at the end of the research might not be applicable to all the students in Malaysia. Specifically, the data we collect in this research did not cover the rural areas with those students being even weaker in their speaking.

Furthermore, debate component is the only issue being focused here, since there are other activities which can enhance students' speaking skills, such as role play, storytelling,the finding of the research will definitely not be the sole solution to the problem.

1.8 Definition of key terms

1.8.1 Debate

According to Cambridge dictionary, debate is a kind of serious discussion of a certain subject in which opposing arguments are put forward.

1.8.2 Communicative Language Teaching Method

According to Jack.C. Richard(2006) in his "Communicative Language Teaching Today" published by Cambridge University Press, communicative language teaching method, or known as CLT, or communicative approach, is a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. In this research, we focus on one of the most important element in CLT method, which is debate.

2. METHODOLOGY

We adopted Henning, Stone and Kelly (2009) action research model which consists of four essential steps which are plan, collect data, analyse data and reflect.It is clearly summarized in table 1.

STEP 1: Plan

2.1 Research Operation Plan

This research is carried out in four stages having each stage carrying their aim respectively. At the first stage, the literature in conjunction with the study is reviewed. At the second stage, findings from the first stage which related to the study will be gathered. Later on, the research objectives, research problems as well as the research questions are developed follow after reviewing the past scholar's research the current education situation. Next, the methodology and instruments to be used in the research are designed. We prepared 15 weeks' timeline or schedule as the basis of our research. In the second stage, the pre-test (traditional teaching method) and post-test (six debate sessions and three speaking tests) will be carried out. The data will be collected from the speaking tests as well as the teacher's observations on the debate sessions and the journal entries written by the students. In the third stage, the quantitative data analysis will be performed through the students' central tendency scores from the speaking tests. On the other hand, qualitative data will be analysed and coded based on the teacher's observations and journal entries written by the students. Finally, we interpret and explain our observations to justify our research questions and objectives.

2.2 Sampling

The population of the study is students from a government-run school in Penang, Malaysia. We decided not to access a large number of participants to avoid the invalidity of the data. Hence, we only choose a heterogeneous class of 30 students of Form 4.

For qualitative data collection, 10 participants will randomly be chosen from the group. Three different levels will be chosen as it represent as they represent three different proficiency levels – high, average and low.

2.3 Instruments

A) Speaking pre-test and post-test

A speaking pre-test will be conducted at Week 3 where this test is carried out to identify the students' speaking competence and proficiency. Teacher will identify the students of low to high proficiency level by checking on their fluency, pronunciation and grammar. On Week 4 and Week 5, students will be placed in a group of six to have the debate session. While in Week 7, a speaking test will be held where teacher will test on students' speaking skills and marks will be given based on the speaking components.

B) Teacher's Observations

Teacher will observe students' speaking competence for all the debate sessions. These observations will be recorded and be used as a qualitative data.

C)Journal Entries

The students are required to write journal entries regarding the debate sessions and how they felt about the approach. Their feedbacks collected from those entries will allow us to identify the effectiveness of debate which is implemented.

Step 2: Collect Data

2.4Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect the data, first thing first to be carried out through this research is observing the previous knowledge of the student. The previous knowledge of the students that are under observation is mainly in the context of their speaking skills. This observation will be conducted

in class while the learning and teaching process is undergone. Traditional teaching method is implemented during this observation so the students' ability in speaking can be generally observed. This observation also can be allocated as the batch mark on how far the next procedure could help them to increase their ability in speaking.
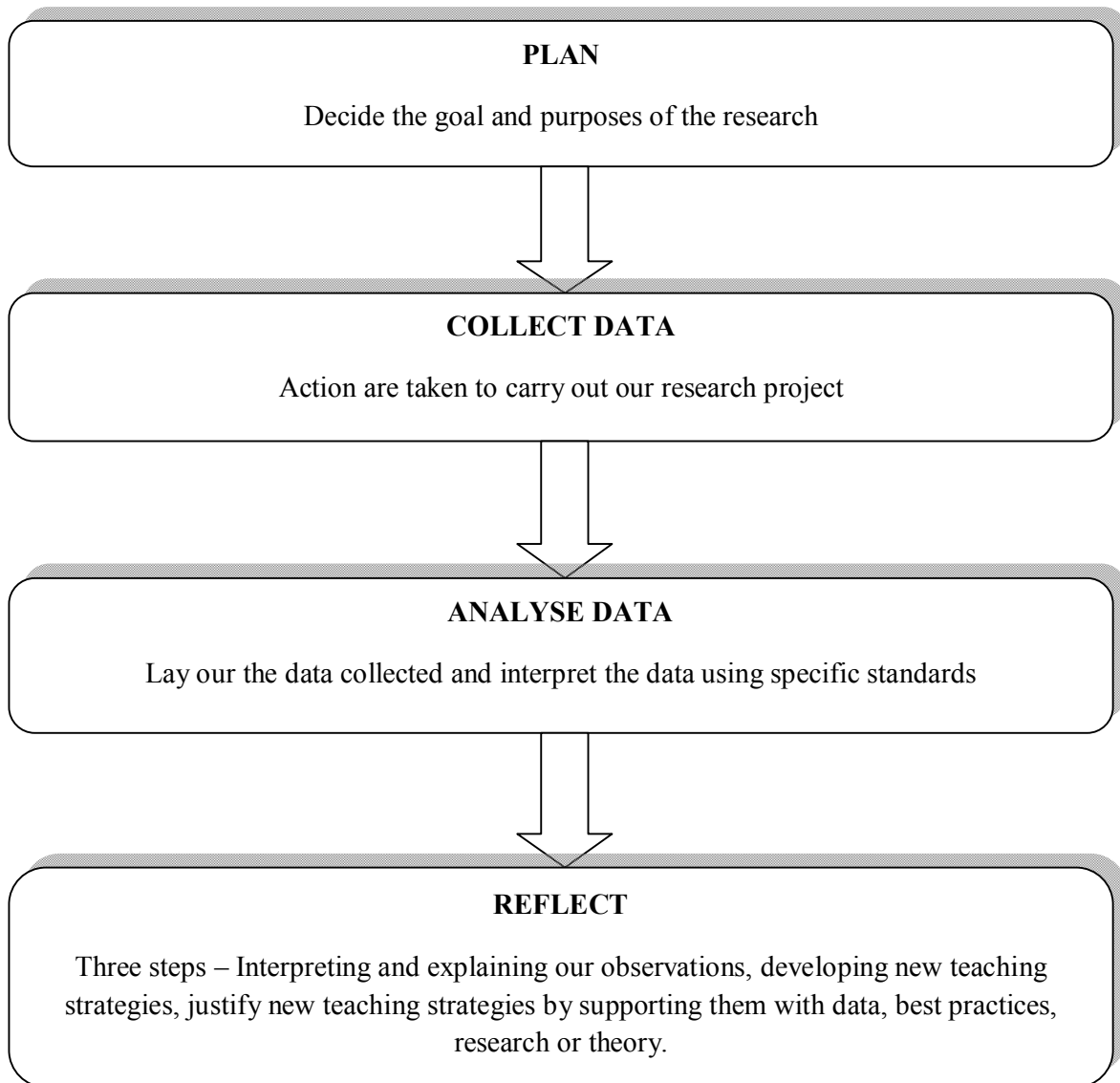
There are marks from six debate sessions and three speaking test to be accumulated as our quantitative data. The debate session will be operated in two sessions in which one hour per session. Student will be instructed to be in a group of 3 to represent the Government and Opponent respectively. Thirty minutes allocated for each of the debate session.

After three weeks of debate session, speaking skill of the students will be tested by using speaking test. Students are needed to form a group of four in the test. The teacher will give them an oral task in term of situation and they need to carry out a discussion about the situation or question. They may give comment, opinion, feedback, suggestion and so on. From this, teacher will review their speaking skill and gives mark based on their speaking performances during the test.

The qualitative data are collected based on teacher observation and students' journal. They will be asked to write a journal entry after completing each debate session and speaking test. Then, teacher who is one of

the researchers will evaluate the journal. The same goes on the following weeks, where after two weeks of having debate sessions, a speaking test will be held. This continues after having six debate sessions and three speaking tests altogether. In conclusion, the post-test will be held from Week 4 to Week 12. The students' mean scores from the three speaking tests will be the quantitative data.

Table 1: Action research model

PLAN

Decide the goal and purposes of the research

COLLECT DATA

Action are taken to carry out our research project

ANALYSE DATA

Lay our the data collected and interpret the data using specific standards

REFLECT

Three steps – Interpreting and explaining our observations, developing new teaching strategies, justify new teaching strategies by supporting them with data, best practices, research or theory.

3. Discussion

Data Analysis Procedure The collected data will be analysed according to the type of data. Mix-model research method is conducted throughout the process. The quantitative data will be analysed and evaluated through the marks result shown by the speaking tests, and the qualitative data will be analysed through observation and journal entries. Each approach takes up a percentage of 50%.

The data collected through 3 oral post tests will be counted and calculated through Maths formula central tendency in order to analyse the students' performance and to see whether the debate strategy is effective or not. Each student's speaking performance for each of the test will also be gathered. The mark will range from 5 which is the full mark to 1 mark which is the lowest mark depending on the students' performance in each speaking component. And the total mark for each student's overall performance will range from 5 to 25. And through the final percentages shown by the central tendency, a clear understanding of how much the whole class have actually improved their speaking skills with the continuous 6 weeks practice of debate will be shown, ranging from week 4 until week 12, with the gradual increase of the central tendency every week. The following is the formula: $\sum X$ stands for the total amount of marks of all the students, and N stands for the number of students, M stands for central tendency, also known as Mean.

$$M=\sum X/N$$

An observation table for the researchers to write the observation comment for the students' performance in the pre-test and debate. In total will be 6 weeks' observation for each student. Plus the first observation pre-test on week 3 conducted on the students before apply debate activity on the students, analyse through the researchers' comment in every week of how the students have actually improved and enhance their speaking skills from at the beginning when the researcher has just arrived at their school until the end of the research when they have been practicing debate for already 6 weeks.

Eight students will be randomly chosen and their journal entries will be analysed. Each student will be asked to write 6 journal entries at the end of the week 15. The students will be asked to write about their opinion on the debate method.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, this paper aims to propose a plan on enhancing English speaking skills among students in Malaysia through the communicative language method using qualitative and quantitative research method. Due to the time and space limit, only a particular class will be chosen and tested, thus this action

research proposal contains certain shortcomings.

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N	ACTIVITIES	WEEKS

Appendix

O.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	Identify problem and prepare the research proposal	/														
2	1) Obtain permission to conduct the research from: • Head of English Language Department of the school • The school principal • PPD • JPN 2) Distribute consent letters to student and parents and collect from them.		/													
3	Pre-test (traditional teaching method) is administered			/												
4	Post-test is administered : • Debate Session 1 is carried out				/											
5	Debate Session 2 is carried out					/										
6	Speaking Test 1 is administered						/									
7	Debate Session 3 is carried out							/								
8	Debate Session 4 is carried out								/							
9	Speaking Test 2 is administered									/						
10	Debate Session 5 is carried out										/					

11	Debate Session 6 is carried out										/				
12	Speaking Test 3 is administered											/			
13	Speaking Test 3 is administered												/		
14	Analysis, discussion, reflection and conclusion of data													/	
15	Submission of final report														/

Table 2: ESTIMATED RESEARCH TIMELINE

LESSON PLAN

Date: 2017

Time: 11 – 12 pm.

Class: 4 Cerdik

Enrolment: 25

Language proficiency: Low

Topic: Vocabulary

General objective: The student may be able to translate English term to Bahasa Malaysia.

Specific objectives: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Translate correctly 50% of the dialogue.

Teaching aids:

1. Slideshow presentation
2. Marker Pen

3. Whiteboard
4. Glass Jar
5. Folded paper of characters
6. Appendix A

Stage/Time	Activity	Notes

Set induction (3 minutes)	1. The teacher asks the students the synonyms of the five words through slide.
	   a. Pretty
	   b. Nice
	   c. Angry
	   d. Say
	   e. Right
	 2. Teacher asks the students about the topic of the day.
	
	 3. Teacher writes the topic on the whiteboard.
		• Slideshow Presentation
		 • Marker pen
		 • Whiteboard

Step 1 (10 minutes)	1. Teacher distributes a handout of a short text in term of dialogue. 2. Teacher explains briefly about the text. 3. Teacher asks two students to converse the dialogue in front of the class. 4. Teacher instruct the student to work in pair. 5. Teacher asks the student to translate the English dialogue into Bahasa Malaysia.	• Appendix A
Step 2 (20 minutes)	1. As continuation to the Activity 1, the students are instructed to act in a role-played activity based on the situation from the given dialogue. The students will be needed to converse in Bahasa Malaysia according to their translated dialogue during Activity 1. 2. Teacher asks each of the student from the pair to pick one	• Folded paper of a characters • Glass jar

Stage/Time	Activity	Notes
	folded paper from inside a glass jar that consist the characters in the dialogues. 3. Teacher assists the student during the practice. 4. Teacher calls randomly any group to present their role play. 5. After each role-play, teacher corrects any mistakenly translated dialogue by the student.	

Closure (2 minutes)	1. The teacher does a recap by asking some questions in relation to the moral values of the short play.
	   a) *Do you think that the bank of your vocabulary are added today?*
	   b) *Can you list down the new vocabulary that you gained today?*	

EVALUATION STANDARD

21-25 MARKS: The student answers the questions successfully, speaks clearly and accurately, and brings additional linguistic material to the basic situation, for example, using new functions or structures that beginning language learners seldom use spontaneously.

16-20MARKS: The student answers the questions successfully with a few errors. The student is able to communicate effectively in spite of these errors and offers meaningful responses.

11-15 MARKS: The student answers the questions with difficulty. He or she demonstrates minimum oral competence, make obvious grammar mistakes, hesitates frequently, and shows little confidence, offering only minimal, predictable responses.

6-10 MARKS: The student is unable to answer the questions or fails to demonstrate acceptable mastery of functions, vocabulary, and grammatical concepts.

0-5 MARKS: Communication is almost non-existent. The student does not understand the questions and is unable to answer the question. Errors are so extreme that communication is impossible.