

Synchronous Approach in Improving Students' Speaking Competency

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Abstract. Nowadays, the use of technology has changed teaching and learning experiences and it is seen to be effective in enhancing teaching and learning of English language. It enables learners to be more motivated and independent. Although it is challenging to have the best approach to enhance learners' speaking skills, it is proven by many researchers who have shown the positive outcomes of using technology in teaching and learning of English. Hence, we should admit that teaching and learning of English by using technology enhances teaching and learning of English speaking. Therefore, this article seeks to clarify the effectiveness of LiveSpeak in improving learners' speaking proficiency.

Keywords : Students, Teaching and Learning, Competency

1. Introduction

According to Sirbu [1], communication among the society members is through language. In other words, language is for communication. English is commonly used to connect people from all walks of life. This is because it is an international language and those who are proficient in the language can communicate globally [2]. Mastery of English is important as it is a crucial factor of employment [3]. However, due to poor command of English among Malaysian graduates, the unemployment rate are currently at a worrying stage. This is supported by Lim et al [4] who stated that failure of local graduates competing in the job market is highly influenced by poor command in English. Thus, proficiency in English is important.

There are many past studies done regarding the teaching and learning of English approach to enhance learners' English proficiency. Generally, they are conventional and technology-based teaching and learning approaches. Ghavifekr et al [5] argues that technology-based classroom promotes better learning experience compared to traditional classroom. This statement is supported by Richards [6] for which he also believes that conventional approach emphasizes more in the design of syllabuses, methods, materials and teacher training on exploiting classrooms as the best environment to learn English and practice authenticity of language use. Therefore, teaching and learning of English used to be more exam-oriented and classroom-based. Also, the conventional methods show less emphasis on teaching speaking skills [7]. This results in learners who are lack of opportunities to use English for oral communication in real context, which affect their mastery of communicative skills. On the other hand, the infusion of technology in English language classroom motivates learners and promotes effectiveness in English language learning [8]. Tamo [9] also believes

that technology in English language classroom benefits learners as there are more opportunities for meaningful and authentic use of language for communication.

However, there are more past studies that are done on asynchronous in comparison to synchronous teaching and learning of English among foreign students. Therefore, this paper focuses on speaking proficiency, second language acquisition theories, conventional and technology teaching, as well as, technological approaches in teaching of speaking skills. This paper is to reveal the effectiveness of LiveSpeak, a synchronous approach, in students' speaking proficiency.

2. Speaking Proficiency

The ability to understand and communicate effectively by using the target language is known as language proficiency [10]. Generally, people interact by speaking so, speaking proficiency is important [11]. According to Scarcella et al [12] speaking proficiency includes grammatical (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), sociolinguistics (e.g. register, speech acts, intonation), strategic (e.g. gestures, topic selection) and discourse competencies (e.g. coherence and cohesion in speech). Being proficient in speaking is a plus point. This is because proficient in speaking promotes communication. Thus, ensures achievements in ceremonial speaking activities, job training activities, job interview and other business purposes [13]. Zaremba [14] added that communication skills, especially in expressing oneself verbally, is a crucial requirement for employment compared to working experience, motivation and academic performance. However, many Malaysian graduates are unable to speak proper English although they do well in their reading and writing [15]. According to a study conducted by Hiew [16], Malaysian students encounter problems such as hesitation to speak, self-conscious of speaking proficiency and mixing of other languages in English conversation. Anxiety and reluctant to speak due to fear of being judged hinder the mastery of speaking proficiency. Therefore, in order to overcome these obstacles, it is important for learners to acquire English language through effective approaches

3. Theories in English as Second Language Acquisition

There are two theories of acquiring English as second language that will be discussed in this paper. They are Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. According to Long [17], learners acquire second language when they manage to identify the gap in communication and are able to resolve it through negotiation of meaning strategies such as confirmation checks or request for clarification. He added that the interaction promotes comprehension and acquisition of vocabulary, morphology or syntax. In this context, learners get to have the opportunity to practice different forms and functions through interaction with other speaker. Therefore, they will be able to gain speaking competency.

Learners are also be able to gain speaking competency in second language when they are given the chance to produce language and the acquisition takes place when they are able to self-correct the errors made in their speech [18].

In other words, it is believed that learners are able to acquire and to show improvement in their speaking competency in the target language when they are given the chance to interact

with other interlocutors and to identify the gap, then, to perform negotiation of meaning strategies and self-correct.

4. Traditional Teaching and Learning of Speaking

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that emphasises on activities and is more student-oriented, which interactive activities such as games, role-play and pair/group work are integrated in the acquisition of language [19]. This is further supported by Oradee [20] who mentioned that communicative activities such as information gap, a jigsaw puzzle, games, problem-solving and role-playing are some communicative activities that enhance speaking skills. This can be shown from a study on the use of games in English language learning by Liu et al [21] which the findings showed that incorporating games into English learning process could enhance learning outcomes and motivation compared to using non-gaming method. This statement is also supported by Gaudart [22] as his study revealed that using games in language teaching allowed rooms for practice, which learners could fully use the language that they had learned through participation in the motivating communicative process throughout the game and this eventually lead to learning. Also, the conversation game carried out by Reese et al [23] helped students to practice speaking in a less constrained way than conventional language classroom. However, they highlighted that the game is limited to teaching conversation skills and turn taking instead of helping students to produce longer pieces of discourse such as speeches and narratives due to often interruption by classmates. The research on the effectiveness of role-play activities by Kuśnierek [24] also aimed to study the effectiveness of those activities in developing students' speaking skills and the findings were positive as students felt funny to play someone else's role. The researcher further mentioned that students were participative in such appealing exercises and they managed to overcome their fear in speaking because they had ample time which focused to speaking in the target language. Similar research was carried out by Yuliana et al [25] and the findings were also encouraging as role play helped students to speak more fluently and motivated them to speak. However, they claimed that there would be insufficient time for students to practice in the classroom. Therefore, they proposed that teacher could allocate time to practice at home. Another way of enhancing learners' speaking skill is to do pair or group work in problem-solving tasks, which Thamarana [26] claimed that they are active modes of learning that maximises students learning opportunity in negotiation of meaning. However, they mentioned that the group or pair work should not be considered an essential feature used all the time as it may not be inappropriate in some contexts.

Information gap is also another communicative language activity that encourages speaking ability [27]. The study conducted by Defrioka [28] also revealed that implementation of information gap activities could improve students' speaking ability as they would participate in all class activities interactively. Asrobi et al [29] also claimed that information gap technique was effective as it encouraged cooperative relationship among students and this provided more opportunities for students to work on negotiation of meaning, which made them felt more comfortable to speak and enabled them pay attention to communicate the intended meaning and to social context of the communicative event. Despite the advantages, information gap activities have limitations as well. According to Yuniarti [30], conducting information gap activities consumed too much time, demanded teachers to be skillful in controlling the class and demotivated students as they disliked the materials given, as well as, the confusion that arise in asking and answering their friends due to the limitation in the vocabulary items. As for the jigsaw puzzle, Choe [31] claimed that it had positive effect towards the use of communicative strategies among students and this affected interaction

which eventually assisted second language learning. This could be seen through their performances as the learners had outstanding performances in speaking competencies, especially in vocabulary, accuracy, fluency and pronunciation [32]. However, Rika [33] argued that there were some limitations in jigsaw puzzles which students faced difficulty in sharing of opinion as they had limited vocabulary, as well as, the lack of confidence among them as they were afraid of making mistakes. Based on the previous past studies on the use of communicative language teaching approach, the findings showed that the activities were effective in promoting students' speaking proficiency. This statement is supported that a similar study that was conducted by Thesis et al [34] on the use of communicative activities in developing English speaking ability of students and the findings illustrated that communicative activities improved speaking ability of students in Bangkok. However, Sukriti Sohini Ferdous [35] refuted the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in enhancing students' speaking proficiency because he claimed that it was significant that learners' speaking proficiency in English was still not up to the ideal standard after 10 years of implementation among Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) students in Bangladesh. His justification was listening and speaking skills were neglected and this could be proven as students could not interact properly in different circumstances. He also mentioned that this approach was not as effective as many teachers of HSC were still confused regarding the application of the approach in classroom.

Therefore, there were language classrooms that were technologically advanced. The incorporation of multimedia and internet in language teaching promotes communicative approach of teaching as students would be exposed to more authentic materials and they were more enthusiastic in learning the target language through technology [36].

5. Technology in Promoting Speaking Proficiency

There are a lot of approaches used to promote speaking proficiency. In 2014, World Wide Web was used to promote speaking proficiency among Iranian high school students. The study by Samadi et al [37] showed that the approach was effective as learners improved in their speaking skills. Although this approach is effective, there is insufficient supply of facilities and it affects the teaching and learning process. In the same year, 2014, another approach was introduced, which was the digital storytelling. The online self-study resources, online recording program and speech-text program (STP) were effective in enhancing speaking competency of learners from the United States of America. However, learning progress was tedious and challenging to evaluate as learning took place beyond classroom context. In 2015, Videos for SPEaking (VISPE) was introduced to Spanish learners and the findings showed that the approach helped in improving learners' speaking proficiency [38]. Learners master speaking skills through the production of audio description clips after watching the given videos but the downside of the approach was overemphasis on single vocabularies. Skype was implemented in English speaking lessons, in 2015. The study was done among Colombia adult learners and the findings showed that the sufficient opportunities for learners to practise on the topic of discussion before the online sessions helped in enhancing learners' speaking proficiency [39]. There was real time coaching with the native American instructor who would provide instant feedback and learners would get to communicate with native speaker with authentic accent. However, due to the the drilling in advance, there is lack of authenticity in the interaction. Later on, in 2017, audio-visual

speaking activities were used in English speaking lessons. Buckingham et al [40] conducted the study among Turkish young learners and they showed improvement in their speaking, especially in pronunciation, vocabulary and accuracy as they were given the opportunities to practice and teachers helped in giving them constructive feedback.

6. Implication and Conclusion

Based on the critical review of technology in speaking, there are more research done on the effectiveness of asynchronous compared to synchronous teaching of speaking in recent years. Also, most of the studies are done among learners from foreign countries. There is lack of study done on synchronous teaching of speaking among Malaysian learners. Therefore, in the future, it will be worthwhile to conduct a study on the effectiveness of LiveSpeak, a synchronous approach in teaching and learning with native speakers from all around the world, in enhancing Malaysian high school students' speaking proficiency. In conclusion, the incorporation of technology in teaching and learning to enhance speaking skills is the current trend and the approach is effective. Technology in teaching and learning of speaking skills is undeniably beneficial to learners as they are able to have better experience in the learning process and be able to communicate with interlocutors through practices which are more interactive and interesting. Hence, we have to admit that teaching and learning of speaking skills through synchronous methodology benefits learners. Therefore, it is worthwhile to use LiveSpeak in teaching and learning of speaking lesson.

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