Improving Students' Speaking Skill through Think Pair Share Strategy: A Classroom Action Research on the English Education Program Students of STKIP Kie Raha Ternate

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Abstract	:	This research was conducted with the aim of testing the effectiveness of the Think-Pair-Share strategy (one of the strategies in the Cooperative Learning Model) in improving students' speaking skills. This study was designed as classroom action research conducted in the English Education study program at STKIP Kie Raha Ternate. 13 out of 26 students participated in the study to take tests and interviews. The researcher also observed the teaching and learning process in the classroom to get details of the learning activities. The data collected by the researcher was then interpreted using a speaking rubric that was validated by the expert. Based on data analysis, the researcher found that the students' speaking ability experienced a significant increase after going through several speaking learning activities using the Think Pair Share strategy. The reasons behind students' difficulties in speaking are also discussed.

1. Introduction

Language is one of the natural abilities possessed by humans that is used to communicate. Currently, it is estimated that the number of languages actively spoken in the world ranges from 6000-7000 languages. Among these languages, English has been selected as one of the international Lingua Franca studied and used by billions of people from different linguistic backgrounds.

Different countries treat English differently. In some countries, English is adopted as a Second Language. Meanwhile, in other countries, including Indonesia, English is learned, taught, and used as a foreign language. Both as a second language and as a foreign language, English users (non-native) must master all language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In general, writing and speaking skills are considered skills needed to support language production. Scholars, such as Burn and Joyce (1997, pp.54-55), believe that language learning aims to integrate these two skills. In order to achieve this goal, the difficulties in mastering these two skills need to be overcome. Especially in speaking skills, it is assumed that the students have difficulty due to a lack of confidence and worries about making mistakes in speaking due to weak vocabulary and pronunciation.

There are many strategies tested by researchers to overcome students' speaking difficulties in order to improve their speaking skills. In general, the strategies in the Cooperative Learning Model are considered very effective. Of course, this assumption needs to be tested. The researcher, in this case, focuses on implementing the Think Pair Share (later called TPS) strategy.

Speaking is one of the productive skills that must be mastered by English learners. Its function as a productive skill makes speaking an essential skill in communication. Language learning activities in classrooms have also focused on improving these skills, as well as the development of technology-based learning media that has been directed to support mastery of speaking skills (Bahadorfar & Omidyar, 2014, pp.9-13).

Experts view speaking skills differently. Ladouse (in Nunan, 1991, p.23) for example, describes speaking as an activity to express oneself or to report activity in a situation by using the right words. Also, speaking is considered an activity of converting a series of ideas verbally and sequentially. Meanwhile, Fulcher and Glenn (2003) simplify speaking as the use of language to communicate.

From several ideas about speaking skills, it can be agreed that speaking is a verbal activity that involves exchanging information between language users. However, in the discussion, this view can develop to be more complex.

Seeing the importance of speaking skills, many strategies have been developed in different learning models. Although so many strategies have been developed, the main goal is to put learning speaking into an interactional activity (Kayi, 2006). Two learning models that are considered the most effective in achieving this goal are Communicative Language Teaching (hence CLT) and Cooperative Learning (hence CL).

CLT is considered effective because this learning model creates a real communication atmosphere. In other words, teachers are required to create an atmosphere of real communication in the classroom so that students are mediated to experience linguistic interactions as well as real communication in a social environment.

The communication environment built with CLT is believed to be able to promote students' speaking skills. The reason is that the communication environment and linguistic interaction activities in the classroom turn into authentic and meaningful communication in which students collaborate to construct and negotiate the meanings they communicate. This activity will certainly improve students' oral communication skills.

Kayi (2006) also mentions that discussions, role-playing, simulations, and storytelling are also powerful strategies to support the improvement of students' speaking skills as long as these activities are planned and carried out properly.

Language learning, especially learning to speak (with any strategy), needs to directly review the difficulties experienced by both students and teachers in the process of learning and teaching speaking.

Students, even those who have graduated, often find themselves unprepared for engaging in conversation outside the classroom. The reasons they often gave were related to the lack of opportunity to practice speaking in the classroom and lack of self-confidence. Of course, choosing the right activities and discourses in the classroom is not an easy thing for some teachers (Aleksandrak and Magdalena, 2011, p.38) so many students feel they are not trained in learning to speak. That is why they do not have enough readiness, both in terms of knowledge and mentality to engage in conversation in English.

The difficulties experienced by students are also difficulties for teachers. The lack of ability to pronounce words correctly and low self-confidence in students is a reflection of the difficulty of teachers to improve students' pronunciation and confidence. The teachers admitted that they had difficulty keeping students engaged in conversation, improving their pronunciation, and increasing their motivation, as well as their vocabulary. With so many difficulties experienced by both students and teachers, the right solution must be offered to improve students' speaking skills in the classroom (Yusuf and Zuraini, 2016, p. 545).

One strategy that can be considered as a solution is TPS. According to Jolliffe (in Pristiyani, 2017, p.21), TPS is one of the strategies in the cooperative learning model that can promote and support higher-level thinking. In the implementation of TPS, the teacher asks students to think about a topic, divides students into pairs to discuss the topic, then shares ideas with other group students.

The advantage of the TPS strategy that relates it to speaking skills is that there is an element of discussion in it. By using the TPS strategy, students get the opportunity to practice speaking where they have to discuss with their partners and share ideas with students in other groups.

Several researchers have tested the effectiveness of TPS in learning English. Sugiarto and Sumarsono (2014), Syafii (2018), and Cahyani (2018) found that TPS was effective in significantly improving students' speaking skills. In this context, the researcher makes these studies the basis of the research and since all the research mentioned above is classroom action research, this research is a partial replication of the previous studies.

Although TPS has been tested as one of the effective strategies in English classes, Darisa (2016, p.15), notes that this strategy has several weaknesses that need to be considered. Among the weaknesses of the TPS strategy is the lack of monitoring by teachers of group activities and the absence of a moderator in the group to organize discussions. These two weaknesses were addressed in this study by limiting the number of groups to facilitate monitoring and appointing a moderator for each group to organize the discussion.

2. Method

This research was designed as classroom action research. The researcher thinks that this research design is appropriate because this design positions classroom activities as the center of learning and traces what actually happens in classroom activities (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p.2). The nature of classroom action research can lead the researcher to the research objective, namely to understand the dynamics of learning to speak and if it is based on Bogdan and Biklen (in Khasinah, 2013, p. 108) that action research aims to bring about a social change, associated with the researcher's goal to improve students' speaking ability, then classroom action research is the most appropriate design for this research.

There were 13 students involved in this study (sample), selected from 26 students (population). The researcher collected data in the form of observations, interviews, and tests. The students were asked for their opinion about their speaking difficulties and their experiences in learning using the TPS strategy. Meanwhile, the speaking test followed by the students aims to see the development or changes that occur in their speaking ability after the implementation of the TPS strategy.

Data from interviews were analyzed using content analysis techniques, while test data were interpreted with the help of speaking rubrics which were validated by experts. Data analysis is carried out so that the researcher has a basis for drawing conclusions.

3. Result and Discussion

The researcher divides the discussion of the research results into two parts, namely the identification of speaking difficulties and the application of TPS to overcome these difficulties which can be assessed based on the improvement of their speaking ability.

3.1. Students' speaking difficulties

The data that the researcher discusses in this section are data collected from observations and interviews. This phase is the preliminary phase where the researcher tries to get information about the speaking abilities and difficulties experienced by students.

Observational data in the classroom showed that only 3% of the students were actively involved in a simple conversation with the researcher (the conversation was conducted in English). Meanwhile, 93% of students looked very passive even though some of them could respond to the researcher's question (students responded in their native language).

After a while, the researcher found that some students who were initially passive began to respond by applying code-mixing. The researcher saw that this proved that the students had a lack of vocabulary so they had to combine English and Indonesian vocabulary in one sentence. The way they responded was also filled with concern. This can be detected from the number of pauses and responses that require prompts from the researcher.

The researcher guided the students by asking questions such as whether they had their strategies in learning the speaking skill, their opinions about the speaking subject, and what they liked most in learning speaking. However, the majority of students remained silent and seemed embarrassed to respond to the questions. The code-mixing mentioned above sometimes happened when the students started to join the conversation by responding to the questions when those were repeated in their native language.

Still, most of the students did not enjoy the situation. Those who tried to respond to the questions had errors in pronouncing the words they used and stopped in the middle of the sentence because they did not know how to continue their sentence. Some students have been noticed titling up their heads and wanted to join the conversation but they were clearly hesitant to start speaking up. The classroom situation turned awkward to some degree.

Seeing the awkwardness in the classroom, the researcher assumed that the students were not ready to engage in classroom conversation which was conducted fully in English. The researcher then decided to conduct unstructured interviews with the students. These interviews aimed to capture the reasons behind their hesitance to speaking

The researcher started by asking a question related to each student's speaking mastery. The students' responses vary from one to another. However, they generally had difficulties related to the lack of vocabulary (including pronunciation) and self-confidence. Here is information gathered from the students' responses (translated).

Q: "Why is speaking difficult for you?"

S^1: "I don't know the translation of the words I want to say."

S^2: "I want to be able to speak like you, but when people talk, I cannot understand because I often forgot the (meaning of the) words."

S^3: "I did not have enough practice, I guess."

S^4: "I feel shy. My friends can talk in English but I cannot do the same."

S^5: "I often forgot the words and I do not have friends to practice speaking with."

The rest of the students' responses were similar to those of the researcher listed above. Based on the information, it is reasonable to assume that the students' speaking difficulties are rooted in at least two grounds, the lack of vocabulary and the lack of self-confidence.

The students were excited to improve their speaking skills but they had less action to actualize it. Breaking down the factors, we can also find that the lack of vocabulary entails a weakness in pronunciation which in turn triggers misunderstanding among the students in speaking practice. Most of the time, this situation discourages the students from being engaged in the conversation. Moreover, it was noted that the students had fewer opportunities to practice either inside or outside the classroom.

3.2. The Implementation of Think Pair Share (TPS) Strategy

It has been stated that TPS is a strategy in the Cooperative Learning Model that enables the students to think and discuss their thoughts on a specific subject. It is also assumed that the discussion is the element that mediates the students to speak to each other. This element is expected to enhance the opportunities for the students to have enough speaking practice that in turn will improve their speaking skills.

This study was conducted in two cycles. The cyclical conduct is following the common design of classroom action research. It was conducted in two cycles since in the second cycle the reflection showed that significant improvement in the students' speaking skills had taken place.

The researcher had chosen topics to be discussed in different sessions. In the first session, the topic was Natural Disaster while the topic of the second session was the National Examination. In each session, the researcher did several brainstorms to familiarize the students with the vocabulary they would use in the discussion. During the sessions, the students were allowed to use their smartphones in case they need to access electronic dictionaries. The opening conversation ran well with more students engaged in the conversation. It seemed that the students overcome their vocabulary difficulties with the devices they had on their hands.

The researcher then divided the students into several groups. In each group, the students and their pairs were given a paper with questions that they must discuss and answer. The questions were expected to guide the students' discussion. When the students started to discuss, the researcher (and a collaborator) started to use the speaking rubric to evaluate their speaking. The evaluation continued when the students came to present the result of the discussion. This was the chance to measure their speaking skill since they presented the result of the discussion in English and they were not aware that their speaking was evaluated. This could emerge the naturalness in students when they speak and also decrease their hesitance.

Five speaking elements were evaluated from the students' speaking activities: pronunciation, grammar, word order, fluency, and vocabulary. Based on the scoring system applied in the speaking rubric that the researcher used, the students' speaking scores can be observed. The following table shows the difference in the students' speaking mean scores in the first and second cycles.

Element/Mean Score	Cycle I	Cycle II
Pronunciation	4,5	6,5
Grammar	4	5
Word Order	4,5	4,5
Fluency	4	5
Vocabulary	5,5	6

The table above shows that the students' speaking skills improved in terms of pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary, except for word order. It is assumed that the word order skill requires independent practices (e.g., writing) and refinement in the students' knowledge of morphology and syntax which were not within the scope of this study.

After having the students' speaking scores, the researcher conducted another unstructured interview to capture any changes in the students' responses regarding the speaking subject. The students were aware that vocabulary, including the words' pronunciation and their use, was very important in order to be able to speak fluently.

Changes in the students' speaking skills also occurred in terms of self-confidence. The way the students responded to the questions was more satisfactory at the end of the second cycle compared to the preliminary phase and first cycle. The eagerness in involving into the conversation was somehow increased but it was difficult to capture. However, generally, the students' speaking skills were helped with the implementation of TPS.

4. Conclusion

Speaking is an important language skill to master by EFL students. In most situations, the students are not ready enough to engage in conversations either inside or outside the classroom. Some difficulties were captured including the lack of vocabulary and self-confidence. However, these difficulties were rooted on many grounds including the lack of practice opportunities, teaching strategies, and so forth. Focused on teaching strategies, teachers should consider learning models in which the students can be more actively engaged in speaking activities. In this case, Think Pair Share, a strategy in the Cooperative Learning Model can be taken into account. From the data captured within two cycles of implementation of this classroom action research, the researcher concluded that the students' speaking skills improved to some extent. However, the implementation of TPS should be carefully planned and monitored for the chance is big that the students need the teacher to guide the activities.

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