IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL THROUGH CONVERSATION

Hijril Ismail

Dosen Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Univ. Muhammadiyah Mataram
(email: hijril_risa@yahoo.co.id)

ABSTRACT

The study are to find out the implementation of conversation in teaching speaking to English students at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013 and to know the students' responses to the use of conversation in teaching and learning process. This research is an action research. In this study the researcher uses action research theory proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart. The participants of the research are English students at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram. The research instrument used by the writer is in the form of observation checklist, test, and questioners. The data in the research are mainly gathered through the use of observation, tests, and questionnaires. After the data are collected, the researcher analyzes them. The finding of the research shows that the implementation of conversation can improve English students' speaking skill at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013. The main score of cycle one is 5.7. And the main score of cycle two is 7.0. The students' responses were positive when conversations were applied in teaching speaking.

Keywords: *Speaking and Conversations*

INTRODUCTION

English as a lingua franca is widely adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other and where one or both speakers are using it as a second or foreign language. There are a number of interlocking reasons for the popularity of English as a lingua franca. Many of these are historical, but they also include economic and cultural factors which have influenced and sustained the spread of the language: a colonial history, economics, travel or transportation, information exchange or technology, and popular culture. English has become a tool for international communication. (Harmer, 2001: 1-5).

In Indonesia where English is not regarded as a second language, English is the first foreign language. It is used as the first foreign language, studied at school or college. In Indonesia, English is taught to elementary students, beginning from grade four as one of the subjects for the local content curriculum, in junior and senior high schools to University English is included in the curriculum. Although English is placed as the foreign language in Indonesia, the competency of learner in this subject is very important to overcome the national development goal. The aim of teaching English in Indonesia is to enable to students to communicate in English, including reading, listening, speaking and writing skill (Diknas: 2004 , 165).

Speaking is the active production skill and use oral production. It is capability of someone to communicate orally with others. The one who has skilled in speaking can be identified from his/her ability in using the oral language fluently, clearly and attractively. (Hornby, 1989: 135)

Harmer (1990:25) says that the aim of teaching speaking is to train students for communication. Therefore, language activities in speaking class should focus on language use individually. This requires the teacher not only to create a warm and humanistic classroom atmosphere, but also to provide each student to speak. Richards (2002:85) classifies the conversation can be applied in teaching speaking. Conversation is talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information are exchanged (Cambridge Advance Learner's Dictionary, 2008).

In teaching and learning of speaking course, the writer found out some problems such as: most students are low motivation in speaking course, so the researcher wants to show the other lectures that conversation can improve students' motivation in learning English and Most of the students still mispronounce in a lot of English words therefore the researcher wants to enhance students' pronunciation skill. Accordingly the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How is the conversation implemented in teaching speaking to English students at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013?

2. What are the students' responses to the use of conversation in teaching and learning process?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Speaking is the active production skill and use oral production. It is capability of someone to communicate orally with others. The one who has skilled in speaking can be identified from his/her ability in using the oral language fluently, clearly and attractively (Widowson, 1994:116). Brown (1994: 135) says that speaking is a skill in producing oral language. It is not only an utterance but also a tool of communication.

Harmer (1990:25) says teaching speaking is to train students for communication. Therefore, language activities in speaking class should focus on language use individually. This requires the teacher not only to create a warm and humanistic classroom atmosphere, but also to provide each student to speak.

Harmer (2001:271-275) presents some activities related to classroom speaking activities;
1. Acting from a script
2. Communication Games
3. Discussion
4. Prepared talks
5. Questionnaires
6. Simulation and role-play.
7. Conversation

Conversation

Conversation is talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information are exchanged (Cambridge Advance Learner's Dictionary, 2008). Dialogue in language teaching is a model conversation, used to practice speaking and to provide examples of language usage. Dialogues are often specially written to practice language items contain simplified grammar and vocabulary, and so may be rather different from real-life conversation. Richards and Schmidt (2002:156).

Conversation is listener or oriented (Brown & Jule, 1986 in Slade, 1986). A conversation requires the speaker to 'face temporal constraints and the social pressures of face-to-face interaction (Chafe, 1986: 16 in Richards & Renandya 2002). A conversation is truly communicative event which is 'a dynamic exchange in which linguistics competence must adapt it self to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic' (Higgs & Clifford, 1982: 58 in Richards & Renandya, 2002: 212).

Conversations 'begin with greetings and progress through various ordered moves: the speaker's and hearer's roles are ascertained, topics are introduced, rights to talk are assumed, new topics are raised, and at the appropriate time, the conversation is terminated in a suitable manner' (Richards, 1983: 118 in Richards& Renandya, 2002: 212). Put briefly, the speaker and the hears have to take the initiative, ask questions, or express disagreement in the conversation, all of which require a command of particular language features and which can be learn' (Underhill, 1987: 45 in Richards and Renandya, 2002: 212).

Richard (1990: 79-80) in Brown (2001: 276) offered the following list of features of conversation that can receive specific focus in classroom instruction:
1. How to use conversation for both transactional and interactional processes
2. How to produce both short and long turns in conversation
3. Strategies for managing turn-taking in conversation, including taking a turn, holding a turn, and relinquishing a turn
4. Strategies for opening and closing conversations
5. How to initiate and respond to talk on a broad range of tropics, and how to develop and maintain talk on these topics.
6. How to use conversation in different social settings and fo different kinds of social encounters, such as on the telephone and informal and formal social gatherings
7. Strategies for repairing trouble spots in conversation, including communication breakdown and comprehension problems
8. How to maintain fluency in conversation through avoiding excessive pausing, breakdowns, and errors of grammar or pronunciation
9. How to produce talk in a conversational mode, using a conversational register and syntax
10. How to use conversational fillers and small talk
11. How to use conversational routines.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Setting

The research conducted to English students at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013. It is located on K.H. Ahmad Dahlan street No. 1 Telp. (0370) 630775 Fax. (0370) 638097 Mataram.

Research Design

The study uses action research theory proposed by Kemmis and Taggart to conduct a research with the title *Improving Students' Speaking Skill through Conversation to English students at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013.*

Subject of the Research

The subject of the research is English students at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013. They are four classes which consist of 80 students. In this research, the writer took V/B class consists of 16 students as subject of the research because they still low motivation to practice speaking, miss in pronunciation, and difficult to understand English language.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used by the writer are in the form of test which given in end of each cycle, the journal which used to put the notes, and the questioners applied to know the students' responses in using Conversation.

Data Collecting Procedure

In this research, the writer used four methods which utilized in processing of collecting data. The five methods as follows:

Observing. The writer will always write his observation for obtaining information

Surveying. The researcher also distributed questionnaires to his students about the method the researcher uses in the class.

Assessing. The researcher will give the test to students in the end of each cycle to know students' improvement or not and to get things which is decrease in the cycle so that can be continued to next cycle.

Processing. The researcher took some conversation in the classroom while the teaching and learning process is taking place. It is useful for analyzing situations and learning environments.

Research Procedure

Kemmis and Mc Taggert in Keeves and Lakomski (1999: 151) gives an introductory sketch of the process of action research, outlining a spiral of cycles of reconnaissance, planning action, enacting and observing the planned action, reflection, reflecting on the implementation of the plan in the light of evidence collected during implementation, then re-planning (developing a changed or modified action plan), taking further action and making further observations, reflecting on the evidence from this new cycle, and so on.

In this research procedure, the researcher used two cycles to enhance students' speaking skill. The steps will be applied in this research as follows:

Planning.

The researcher read school's syllabus as reference to make a lesson plan which is used in teaching and learning process.

Acting and observing.

The researcher taught his students by using conversation to overcome the problem which is found in the class. When he was teaching his students, he also observed by writing all of the things which took place when teaching and learning process.

Reflecting.

In the end of implementation of the cycle, the researcher made reflecting for finding out the result or the improvement after acting. If he finds the students still luck of motivation and mispronunciation, he can continue to the next cycle.

Technique of Data Analysis

In line with research objectives, that is to find out the implementation of conversation can improve the students' speaking, the result of each cycle compared. The different results show whether there is some improvements in students' speaking ability or not. The Students' responses to the use of conversation in teaching and learning process are determined from questioners which are analyzed by listing the answers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It deals with discussions of all activities that happened during the action research. This is also about the result of questioners was given in end of the research.

This research consisted of two cycles. Each cycle had three steps: planning, acting and observing, and reflecting. The procedure of each cycle is as follows:

Cycle 1
1. **Planning**

There were several actions implemented in the planning. The actions are as follows:

a. Analyzing the Speaking Class Syllabus

The speaking class syllabus was taken from the English course syllabus. The researcher used English Course syllabus to design the lesson plan.

b. Designing Lesson Plan

After choosing the syllabus, researcher continued by designing lesson plan. It was matched with the objective of the research. The researcher designed the lesson plan which using conversation to help students to improve their speaking skill.

2. Acting and observing

The speaking class was started by brainstorming or warming up. Brain storming or warming up was asking and answering. The lecturer started the lesson by greeting, asking students what they felt in that morning. It took about 5 minutes. After that the lecturer started while activities namely introduced a material and informed the aim of the material to the students so that they are well focused. This activities were always undertaken every meeting.

In the first cycle, the researchers applied conversation three times meeting. In the first meeting used "talking about personal life", the second applied "do you have a good time" and the last utilized "talking to receptionist".
The applying these conversations in teaching and learning process:

In the first meeting in cycle one the researchers asked students to read louder after lecturer about the conversation of personal life which appeared on slide. After that the students asked to memorize the conversation and invited them to act out it in front of the classroom. In the end in this activity, the lectures asked to answer WH questions which appeared below the conversation. To close that meeting the lecturers gave assignment to the students by giving a dialogue about "do you have a good time" it should be committed to the next meeting. To find out that the students had

understood about instruction or not, the lecturer asked two students to stand up and repeat instructions were informed.

The activities in the second meeting almost same with the first meeting but there was a little bit diversity. In the second meeting, the lecturer asked the students to read the dialogue in the first time in that meeting without repetition after lecturer and also the other distinction was the lecture wrote the students' mispronunciation on the whiteboard and pronounced the words. It was carried out in the end of the meeting. Before close the meeting, the lectures gave the other conversation entitled "talking to receptionist".

In the third meeting of cycle one was combination activities in the first and second meetings because before the students invited to come in front of the classroom. The lecturer showed the dialogue about "talking to receptionist" to students and read dialogue with correct pronunciation and the students repeat after him. In addition, the next activity carried out like in the second meeting.

The first cycle was ended with evaluation. It was making conversation about "I am going shopping". It took for about thirty minutes. The teacher asked the students to work in pair. He did not allow the students to look their conversation wrote when they acted it out in front of the class.
The result of the evaluation of the first meeting is as follows:

Students	Fluency	Pronunciation	Grammar	Vocabulary	Organization	Appropriacy	Content	Average Score
1	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	5,7
2	7	7	6	7	6	7	6	6,5
3	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	5,4
4	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5,7
5	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5,7
6	6	5	6	6	5	5	6	5,5
7	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5,7
8	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	5,7
9	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	5,8
10	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	5,8
11	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	5,7
12	7	7	7	6	6	7	6	6,5
13	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	5,8
14	6	5	6	6	7	5	6	5,8
15	6	7	5	5	5	7	5	5,7
16	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5,5
17	5	5	5	6	5	5	6	5,2
Mean								**5.7**

From the table above it can be seen that the lowest score is 5.2 and the highest score is 6.5 There was one student who got score 5.2 and there were two students who got 6.5 The mean from the first meeting evaluation is 5.7.

3. Reflecting

Based on the activities in the meeting, there are some points that the researcher can conclude:

a. Students still made mistakes in pronunciations. Most of them were still influenced by their mother tongue, Bimaness, Sasakness, and Sumbawaness.

b. Students were also poor in giving response, making interaction in a dialogue or conversation in a spontaneous way.

c. Students were highly motivated and they were interested every time

Cycle 2

1. Planning 2

There were several actions implemented in the planning in the cycle two. The actions are as follows:

a. Re-designing Lesson Plan

After seeing the reflection from cycle one, the researcher revised the lesson plan. He maximized to prepare the dialogue but asked the students to make conversation directly in improving the students' speaking skill.

2. Acting and Observing 2

Asking and giving response was the brain storming in the first meeting in the cycle two. The teacher asked a question to some students by using question statement "I have a bad headache. Do you have any advice?" and the students' answers were various. Based on the students' answers, the teacher asked the students to conclude about the topic. The topic was "*what happened to you*". It took about five minutes.

In the first meeting in cycle two, the researchers asked students to make conversation about "what happened to you" with his/her partner, it took about fifteen minutes. After the students wrote the conversation and invited them to act out it in front of the classroom. In addition, the lectures asked to make WH questions and answering based on their dialogues made. In the end, the lecture wrote the wrong pronunciations and asked the students to choose the correct pronunciation about Hospital. It is /hospital/ or /hospitel/ etc. before the lecturer closed the meeting. He gave assignment to students to prepare a conversation about "Future Plans" and acted out the conversation with their partners in front of the classroom in the next meeting. The activity in the second meeting was same with the first meeting but the difference was in the title of dialogue "Farewell Party".

The last cycle was ended with evaluation. The evaluation was making dialogue. The lecturer asked the students to work in pair and make a dialogue with condition such as: "You call your friend to ask whether he/she will join a business trip next week. Your friend tells you that he/she cannot go because his/her mother is ill. Tell him/her that you are sorry to hear that. Ask him/her who replaces him/her to go. Tell your friend that one of staff members can replace you. End your conversation and wish his/her mother to get well soon".

The result of the evaluation of the first meeting is as follows:

Students	Fluency	Pronunciation	Grammar	Vocabulary	Organization	Appropiacy	Content	Average Score
1	8	7	7	7	6	7	6	6,8
2	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
3	7	6	7	6	6	7	6	6,4
4	8	7	7	7	7	7	6	7
5	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6,8
6	7	7	7	6	7	7	6	6,7
7	8	7	7	7	7	7	6	7
8	7	7	7	6	7	7	6	6,7
9	7	7	6	7	7	6	7	6,7
10	8	7	6	7	7	7	7	7
11	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
12	7	8	8	8	8	9	8	8
13	8	7	7	8	6	7	7	7,14
14	8	7	7	6	7	7	7	7
15	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	7,14
16	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	6,8
17	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	6,8
Mean								**7.0**

Based on the table above it can be seen that the lowest score is 6.4 and the highest score is 8. There was a student who got score 6.4 and there were two students who got 8. The mean from the cycle one evaluation is 7.0

3. Reflecting 2

The second cycle was completely done. The researcher concluded that:
a. The conversation helped students to make their pronunciation better.
b. The communicative activities applied in the speaking class enhanced the students' bravery in speaking English and improving their fluency.

c. By learning to do conversation can motivate students to use practice English

The Result from Questionnaire

At the end of the intervention, the students were asked to fill in questionnaires. The questionnaires asked the students to respond the use of Conversation to improve students' speaking skill. The following table is a summary of the students' answer to questionnaires.

No.	Statements	Options	Number	(%) Priority
1.	Are you impressed on English learning by using Conversation?	Yes	12	75
		No	4	25
2.	Is there any advantage by using Conversation?	Yes	15	93.75
		No	1	6.25
3.	Is there any progress after learning English using Conversation?	Yes	14	87.5
		No	2	12.5
4.	Does Conversation enhance you to improve your speaking skill?	Yes	15	93.75
		No	1	6.25
5.	Is there any difficulty using Conversation?	Yes	9	56.25
		No	7	43.75
6.	Does Conversation make English learning interesting?	Yes	14	87.5
		No	2	12.5
7.	Does Conversation make teacher's teaching interesting?	Yes	14	87.5
		No	2	12.5
8.	Does Conversation make the students more active?	Yes	14	87.5
		No	2	12.5
9.	Is there any cooperation among the students by using Conversation?	Yes	16	100
		No	0	0
10.	By Conversation, is there any communication between teacher and students?	Yes	16	100
		No	0	0
11.	Can Conversation improve students' motivation in learning English?	Yes	15	93.75
		No	1	6.25
12.	Can Conversation improve students' encouragement and self confidence to speak in English?	Yes	14	87.5
		No	2	12.5
13.	Can Conversation enhance students' others ability beside speaking, for example reading and writing?	Yes	16	100
		No	0	0

The students' responses to the use of Conversation can be reflected from the questionnaire response. Twelve students (75%) of sixteen students were impressed by learning English using Conversation, fifteen students (93.75 %) of sixteen students answered that there was an advantage of using Conversation, Fourteen students (87.5 %) of sixteen students admitted that they made progress in learning English using Conversation. Fifteen students (93.75 %) of sixteen students answered that Conversation enhanced them to improve their speaking skill. Nine students (56.25 %) of sixteen students found a difficulty in using Conversation while seven students (43.75 %) of sixteen students did not find any difficulty in using Conversation. Fourteen students

(87.5 %) of sixteen students admitted that Conversation made English learning interesting and Conversation also made teacher's teaching method interesting. All students agreed that there was cooperation among the students by using Conversation.

All of the students also agreed that there was communication between teacher and students. Fifteen students (93.75 %) of sixteen students felt that Conversation improved students' motivation in learning English. Forty students (87.5) of sixteen students felt that Conversation can improve students' motivation in learning English and all students felt that Conversation can enhance students' others ability beside speaking, for example reading and writing.

CONCLUSION

In conducting this study, the research team members had done some collaborative works to improve English students' Speaking Skill at fifth semester of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram 2013 by applying the principles of action research. The conclusions concerning the results of the study are as follows:

1. The Students' Improvement on Speaking Skill

There is an improvement of English students' score in speaking skill by applying conversation. It shown by students' main score of cycle one was 5.7. and cycle two was 7.0.

2. The Students' motivations got higher

The students' motivation was higher when the teacher used conversation in teaching and learning process. The students also did all the tasks well and did the teacher's instruction.

3. The English instruction became effective

The various conversation activities given in the English instruction made the instruction effective. All of the students got a chance to speak in each meeting. They got chance to interact with the others by using conversation. There was also the interaction between the teacher and the students during the instruction. The time was well managed by the teacher.

4. The students were more active

The students were free to ask questions to the teacher. The students were encouraged to speak in English when they asked questions to the teacher. The various activities encouraged the students to speak and to get involved in the English instruction.

Bibliography

Brown, H. D. 2000. *Principles Language Learning and Teaching, 4th Edition*. Longman: Edison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Brown, H. D. 2001. *Language assessment principles and classroom practices*. White Plains, NY: Person Education, Inc.

Byrne, D. 1992. *Teaching Oral Language.* Singapore: Longman.

Cameron, L. 2001. *Teaching Language to Young Learners.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen. 2003. *Action Research for Educators*. Oxford: the Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Dikbud. 2002. *Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi Untuk SLTP*. Jakarta: Dharma Bakti

Harmer, J. 2001. *The Practice of English Language Teaching, 3rd Edition.* London: Longman.

Harmer, J. 2003. *How to teach English.* London: Longman.

Nunan, D. 1999. *Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Masschyserts: Heinle and Heinle pulicher.

Nunan, D. 2003. *Practical English Language Teaching*. North America: McGraw Hill / Contemporary.

Richards, J. C. and Richard S. 2002. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistic, 3rd Edition.* Longman: person education

Tomal D. R. 2003. *Action Research for Educators*. Oxford: the Scarecrow Press, Inc.