



Synchronous Approach in Improving Students' Speaking Competency

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Nowadays, the use of technology has changed teaching and learning experiences, and it is seen to be effective in enhancing teaching and learning of the English language. It enables learners to be more motivated and independent. Although it is challenging to have the best approach to improve 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 Live Speak in improving learners' speaking proficiency.

Keywords: *Synchronous Proficiency, Technology in Promoting Speaking.*

Introduction

According to Sirbu, (2015), communication among society members is through language. In other words, writing is for discussion. English is commonly used to connect people from all walks of life. It is because it is an international language, and those who are proficient in the literature can communicate globally (Reddy, Mahavidyalaya, & Hyderabad, 2016). Mastery of English is essential as it is a crucial factor of employment (Abdul Kadir, Noor, & Shakizah, 2015). However, due to poor command of English among Malaysian graduates, the unemployment rate is currently at a worrying stage. It is supported by Lim et al. (Lim & Bakar, 2004), who stated that the poor command profoundly influences the failure of local graduates competing in the job market in English. Thus, proficiency in English is essential.

There are many past studies done regarding the teaching and learning of the English approach to enhance learners' English proficiency. Generally, they are conventional, and a technology-based teaching and learning approach. Ghavifekr & Rosdy, (2015) argue that a technology-based classroom promotes a better learning experience compared to a traditional class. This statement is



supported by Richards, (2015), and he also believes that the conventional approach emphasises more in the design of syllabuses, methods, materials, and teacher training on exploiting classrooms as the best environment to learn English and practise authenticity of language use. Therefore, teaching and learning of English used to be more exam-oriented and classroom-based. Also, conventional methods show less emphasis on teaching speaking skills (Derakhshan, Tahery, & Mirarab, 2015). It results in learners who lack of opportunities to use English for oral communication in a real context, which affects their mastery of communicative skills.

On the other hand, the infusion of technology in the English language classroom motivates learners and promotes effectiveness in English language learning (Cutter, 2015). Tamo (2014) also believes that technology in English language classrooms benefits learners as there are more opportunities for meaningful and authentic use of language for communication.

However, more past studies are done on asynchronous in comparison to synchronous teaching and learning of English among international students. Therefore, this paper focuses on speaking proficiency, second language acquisition theories, general and technical knowledge, as well as, technological approaches in the education of speaking skills. This paper is to reveal the effectiveness of LiveSpeak, an asynchronous method, in students' speaking proficiency.

Literature Review

Speaking Proficiency

The ability to understand and communicate effectively by using the target language is known as language proficiency (Rao, 2016). Generally, people interact by speaking so, speaking ability is essential (Efrizal, 2012). According to Scarcella & Oxford (1992), speaking skill 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. It is because proficiency in speaking promotes communication. Thus, it ensures achievements in ceremonial speaking activities, job training activities, job interviews, and other business purposes. Zaremba (2006) added that communication skills, especially in expressing oneself verbally, are 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. According to a study conducted (Hiew, 2012), Malaysian students encounter problems such as hesitation to speak, the self-consciousness of speaking proficiency, and mixing of other languages in English conversation. Anxiety and reluctance to talk due to fear of being judged hinder the mastery of speaking ability.

Therefore, to overcome these obstacles, learners need to acquire the English language through practical approaches.

Theories in English as a Second Language

Acquisition

There are two theories of learning English as a second language that will be discussed in this paper. They are Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis.

Learners acquire a second language when they manage to identify a gap in communication and can resolve it through the negotiation of meaning strategies such as confirmation checks or requests 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 speakers. Therefore, they will be able to gain speaking competency.

Learners are also able to gain speaking competency in a second language when they are given a chance to produce style, and the acquisition takes place when they can self-correct the errors made in their speech (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). In other words, it is believed that learners can acquire and to show improvement in their speaking competence in the target language when they are given a chance to interact with other interlocutors and to identify the gap, then, to perform negotiation of meaning strategies and self- correct.



Traditional Teaching and Learning of Speaking

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that emphasises activities. It is more student-oriented, in which interactive activities such as games, role-play, and pair/group work are integrated into the acquisition of language (Walia, 2012). It is further supported Oradee (2012) who mentioned that communicative activities such as information gap, jigsaw puzzle, games, problem-solving, and role-playing are some of the communicative activities that enhance speaking skills.

It can be shown from a study on the use of games in English language learning (Liu & Chu, 2010), in which the findings showed that incorporating games into the English learning process could enhance learning outcomes and motivation compared to using the non-gaming method. This statement is also supported by Gaudart (1999) as his study revealed that using games in language teaching allowed rooms for practice, in which learners could fully utilise the language. They had learned through participation in the motivating communicative process throughout the game, and this eventually led to learning. Also, the conversation game (Reese & Wells, 2007) helped students to practise speaking in a less constrained way than conventional language classrooms. However, they highlighted that the game is limited to teaching conversation skills and turn-taking instead of helping students to produce more extended pieces of discourse such as speeches and narratives due to often interruption by classmates.

The research on the effectiveness of role-play activities (Kuśnierek, 2015) also aimed to study the effectiveness of those activities in developing students' speaking skills, and the findings were positive as students felt funny playing someone else's role. The researcher further mentioned that students were participative in such appealing exercises, and they managed to overcome their fear of speaking because they had ample time, which focused on speaking in the target language. However, they claimed that there would be insufficient time for students to practise in the classroom. Therefore, they proposed that teachers could allocate time to practise at home.

Another way of enhancing learners' speaking skills is to do pair or group work in problem-solving tasks, which claimed that they are active modes of learning that maximise students learning opportunities in the 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.

The information gap is also another communicative language activity that encourages speaking



ability. The study conducted by Defrioka (2017) also revealed that the implementation of information gap activities could improve students' speaking ability as they would participate in all class activities interactively. Asrobi, Seken, & Suarnajaya (2013) also claimed that the information gap technique was useful as it encouraged cooperative relationships among students, and this provided more opportunities for students to work on the negotiation of meaning, which made them feel more comfortable to speak and enabled them to pay attention to communicate the intended purpose and to the social context of the forthcoming event. Despite the advantages, information gap activities have limitations as well. Yuniarti (2009) said that conducting information gap activities consumed too much time, demanded teachers be skillful in controlling the class and demotivate students as they disliked the materials given, as well as the confusion that arises in asking and answering their friends, due to the limitation in the vocabulary items. As for the jigsaw puzzle, Choe (Choe, 2000) claimed that it had a positive effect on the use of communicative strategies among students, and this affected interaction, which eventually assisted second language learning. It could be seen through their performances as the learners had outstanding performances in speaking competencies, especially in vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation. However, Rika (2017) argued that there were some limitations in jigsaw puzzles, where students faced difficulty in the sharing of an 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 studies on the use of the communicative language teaching approach, the findings showed that the activities were effective in promoting students' speaking proficiency. This statement is supported by a similar study that was conducted by Phisutthangkoon (2014) on the use of communicative activities in developing the English speaking ability of students. The findings illustrated that communicative activities improved the speaking knowledge of students in Bangkok. However, Ferdous (2011) refuted the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in enhancing students' speaking proficiency because he claimed that it was significant that the learners' speaking proficiency in English was still not up to the ideal standard after ten 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 appropriately in different circumstances. He also mentioned that this approach was not as practical as many teachers of HSC were still confused regarding the application method in the classroom.

Therefore, there were technologically advanced language classrooms. The incorporation of multimedia and the internet in language teaching promotes the communicative approach of education as students would be exposed to more authentic materials, and they were more



enthusiastic in learning the target language through technology (Arifah, 2014).

Technology in Promoting Speaking

Proficiency

There are a lot of approaches used to promote speaking proficiency. In 2014, the World Wide Web was used to encourage speaking proficiency among Iranian high school students. The study by Samadi et al. (Samadi, Maghsoudi, & Azizmohammadi, 2014) showed that the approach was useful as learners improve their speaking skills. Although this approach is practical, there is an insufficient supply of facilities, and it affects the teaching and learning process.

In the same year, 2014, another approach was introduced, which was digital storytelling. The online self-study resources, online recording program, and speech-text program (STP) were useful in enhancing the speaking competency of learners from the United States of America. However, learning progress was tedious and challenging to evaluate, as learning took place beyond the classroom context.

In 2015, Videos for SPeaking (VISP) was introduced to Spanish learners, and the findings showed that the approach helped in improving learners' speaking proficiency (Moreno & Vermeulen, 2015). Learners master speaking skills through the production of audio description clips after watching the given videos, but the downside of the approach was an overemphasis on single vocabulary.

Skype was implemented in English speaking lessons in 2015. The study was done among Colombia adult learners, and the findings showed that sufficient opportunities for learners to practice on the topic of discussion before the online sessions helped in enhancing learners' speaking proficiency (Romaña Correa, 2015). There was real-time coaching with the native American instructor who would provide instant feedback, and learners would get to communicate with native speakers with an authentic accent. However, due to the drilling in advance, there is a lack of authenticity in the interaction.

Later on, in 2017, audio-visual speaking activities were used in English speaking lessons. Buckingham & Alpaslan (2017) conducted a study among young Turkish learners, and they



showed improvement in their speaking, especially in pronunciation, vocabulary, and accuracy as they were given the opportunities to practise. Teachers helped in giving them constructive feedback.

Conclusion

Based on the critical review of technology in speaking, there is 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 a lack of research done on the synchronous teaching of speaking among Malaysian learners. Therefore, in the future, it will be worthwhile to conduct a survey of the effectiveness of LiveSpeak, asynchronous 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 practical. Technology in teaching and the learning of speaking skills is undeniably beneficial to learners as they can have a better experience in the learning process and be able to communicate with interlocutors through practices that are more interactive and interesting. Hence, we have to admit that teaching and learning speaking skills through synchronous methodology benefit learners. Therefore, it is worthwhile to use LiveSpeak in teaching and learning speaking lessons.

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