Involving Students in Developing Material in Speaking Class: Students’ Perceptions

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Abstract

Speaking skills is important especially for future English teachers since it is the most widely used means of communication used in teaching and learning process. In order to be able to deliver the material seamlessly, the teachers should have high competence in speaking with other competences as well. This study aims to identify the students’ speaking circumstances and their perceptions on the involvement of students in developing material in speaking class. This study was a descriptive qualitative study employing observation, questionnaires, and interviews as the means of collecting data. The participants of this study were 7 second semester students of English education department at Universitas Nasional Karangturi Semarang joining in a transactional conversation speaking class. Inductive data analysis in this study was based on Burns (2010) and Hatch (2002). The results showed that the majority of the students still find it difficult to find company in learning speaking from native English, however, it shifted into the native English that wanted to be a conversation buddy with them continuously, not only one-time conversation. The second was that the students were glad to be involved in the material development of the speaking class. Since they have different likings to native English videos to refer to. Introducing a topic at the beginning of the class really helped the students to stay on the right track in searching for the native English video in the speaking class.

Keywords: material development, involving students, videos

Introduction

English as the widely used language throughout the world plays an important role in communication. People with different languages can communicate using English as it is deemed as the international language. Based on this notion, many countries try to make their citizens be able to communicate using English whether by making it as the second/national language to speak or incorporating English as one of the compulsory subjects to learn throughout all levels of education. Indonesia is one of the countries to incorporate English as a compulsory subject to learn from elementary to university level (Agustin, 2011). As the compulsory subject to learn, English is taught from elementary students up to university students with any major so that almost all Indonesian who have education can be assumed to learn English. Therefore, English is not a new thing for Indonesian. Adding to the pandemic situation nowadays, which prevents people from meeting in a relatively large group, it makes people use communication technology massively. There are also benefits from this situation seen from the communication perspective because more people are using communication technology to do meetings, to work, etc. more people also can be connected throughout the world. They do not need to go to foreign countries anymore to do meetings or
seminars where they can do those particular things directly from their home. Therefore, the more people use communication technology makes English become a must learned language to communicate.

With English as the compulsory subject that every level of education has to learn, more demand of English teachers is inevitable. With the notion that there are many schools and universities as well as any other form of education which need English teachers to be available, the need of English teachers is increasing. Therefore, to meet that demand, there are many English education departments available to produce highly skilled English teachers. Not only the future English teachers need to have high competences in all four skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the future English teachers should be able to use technology to meet the education requirement during this pandemic. Not only can technology connect many people in the form of communication, in the educational field, technology is also deemed as essential to deliver the teaching material since in class sessions are still prohibited during the pandemic. Moreover, the shifting from in class learning into online learning does not necessarily change the form of teaching and learning process that the teachers need to convey the learning material mostly in a spoken way. Therefore, mastery of English skills especially speaking is essential to familiarize the students with English as well as become the model for the students to learn.

Although it is deemed as the hardest skill to master (Sumin, 2002; Zang, 2014), speaking is a skill that most people use in their communication and also plays as an indicator of peoples’ competence to communicate (Bahadorfar, & Omidvar, 2014; Ur, 2008). This suggests that if one’s speaking ability is high, then most people will assume that his/her overall English comprehension is also good. While it is a common occurrence in the society that one’s English overall ability is typically seen from the speaking aspect, the other skills such as listening, reading, and writing, is not necessarily unimportant. In fact, all four skills in English are similarly essential to comprehend.

The use of English as the means of communication varies not only in the form of daily or professional conversation, the process of teaching and learning is also categorized as one of the ways to communicate. Consequently, as the future English teachers, English department students are obliged to have high competence in English especially speaking since it will be the most used skill in the teaching and learning process with their future students. In addition to the English skills that have to be mastered, the mastery of using technology cannot be neglected, especially communication technology throughout the internet. The shifting mode from in class meeting to online meeting through the internet has been a while and it is deemed normal in this pandemic situation. For this reason, it is essential for teachers and future teachers to be able to utilize both English skills as well as technology in their teaching.

Meanwhile, to enhance the students’ speaking ability, it is essential to expose them with authentic English (Rao, 2019) to make them familiarize with English in the context of communication. In the teaching and learning of speaking, providing models for the students in the form of videos of native English is easier than inviting the native himself (Hadijah, 2016; Rao, 2019). However, sometimes, not all students find the videos interesting since the content and the way the native speaks does not suit their liking. Thus, this study aims to identify the students’ perception of the involvement of finding the material based on the topic on their own. Letting the students find the videos they preferred more will likely increase the engagement in the teaching and learning process.

Review of Related Literature

Speaking is one of the most used ways of delivering messages in communication. The teaching and learning process also mainly consisted of speaking as the teachers and students interact during the class. The teacher's explanation on the material being taught also uses speaking as well. Therefore, the future teachers need to make sure that their speaking is clear and fluent and easy to understand as well. Not only speaking,
to make the communication runs well, non-linguistic aspects could not be ignored. In fact, both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects are essential in the communication process (Celce-Murcia, 2007)

![Communicative competence model (Celce-Murcia, 2007)](image)

Looking at the diagram above, Celce-Murcia (2007) emphasized the importance of several aspects in communication. In order to be able to have good communication competence, there are six competences that should be comprehended. The first is linguistic competence which contains the understanding of linguistic aspects of English for instance, grammar, vocabulary, etc. The next is sociocultural competence containing the aspect of culture and manner in communication. The third is interactional competence which covers the English speech acts in communication. The fourth is formulaic competence emphasizing on the standard English to be used in communication. The fifth is strategic competence dealing with the way to solve the breakdown in communication. And the last competence is discourse competence containing the ability to develop text not only in the oral form, but also in the written one.

Based on the above notions, in the communication process, not only simply having good speaking ability one can maintain communication well, he/she needs also several accompanying competences as well. However, in order to master speaking, one needs lots of time and practice (Collier, 1987; Klesmer, 1994; and Cummins, 2000). In addition, being exposed to authentic English plays an important role in improving the students’ speaking ability. In recent years, authentic English in many forms can be found easily throughout the internet such as newspapers, radio, tv shows, videos, etc. Different from several decades ago, in order to be exposed to authentic English, one needs to go abroad or invite native English speakers to interact which needs a lot of time and money. With the advanced technology, all of them can be obtained in relatively easy and cheap way thus it is advisable to use technology to teach English (Abram, & Pearlman, 2010; Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019; Paliktzoglou & Suhonen, 2014; and Riswandi, 2016).

Using technology in teaching English is a common occurrence recently since, want it or not, the teachers have to use it due to the pandemic era. The easy connection between people around the globe can be used as one of ways to bring native English into the class. Moreover, if the teachers have not had any connection to foreigners yet, they can use myriads of videos available on the internet containing native English speakers for the students to refer to (Riswandi, 2016).
Methodology

This study was a descriptive qualitative study employing observation, questionnaires, and interviews as the means of collecting data. Incorporating observation and questionnaires can be used to gain students’ perception on how the speaking class is conducted. Moreover, to gain in depth data, an interview was carried out at the end of the class session. The participants of this study were 7 second semester students of English education department at Universitas Nasional Karangturi Semarang joining in a transactional conversation speaking class.

The questionnaires consisted of 15 points focusing on the students’ previous experiences in learning speaking, their difficulties in learning speaking and the overall thinking of the involvement in searching the speaking material on their own during the class sessions. The interviews were administered to get more detailed data on the students’ experiences and opinion on the involvement of choosing the material in the class sessions.

This study employed inductive data analysis to analyze the data based on Burns (2010) and Hatch (2002) to identify the students’ experience as well as their opinions toward the class session. The research questions in this study were

1. How were the students’ circumstances related to their speaking?
2. How were the students’ experiences related to their involvement in developing the material for speaking class?

Finding and Discussions

The participants of this study were 7 second semester students of English education department at Universitas Nasional Karangturi Semarang joining in a transactional conversation speaking class. From the previous study by Jiwandono (2020) with similar participants, the majority of the students were having low performance in speaking due to their lack of practice because they had no company in practicing their speaking. However, the students were considerably highly motivated in learning speaking, making it a good aspect in encouraging them to learn.

From the questionnaires, the first point that can be inferred was related to their learning speaking circumstances which answered the first research question. Although the students were still facing difficulties in finding a company to practice speaking, they had alternatives in learning by watching many videos on the internet. There were many videos of native English speakers available on the internet with a wide range of topics to choose from. These videos substituted the students’ lack of exposure from native English. Thus, the students could make their favorite videos as their role model in improving their speaking ability.

The second point was the students’ difficulties in learning to speak. The vast availability of native English videos really helped the students in learning their speaking. By having exposure in native English situation, the students would have sufficient models to refer to. Although they had difficulties in finding companies in learning speaking, preferably native English speakers, they were still able to have a model to refer from the videos they had found on the internet. By having references from native English speakers, the students felt that they were heading in the right path in learning to speak. Moreover, most of the students tended to choose videos of native English from the USA. They felt that the way of speaking was easier to understand and to refer to compared to other English such as British and Australian.
The third point from the questionnaires was the students’ opinion on the involvement in choosing the material to refer to in speaking class which answered the second question of the study. During the speaking class, the teacher gave the students materials on various topics or situations. On each topic, the teacher only gave an example to be shown to the students in order to familiarize them with the topic being discussed. Then the students were supposed to find other examples by themselves as references for their own dialogue based on the topic given. The students were supposed to do the searching in pairs or in a group of three, the materials they found then were discussed and referred to make the new dialogue on their own. Having this freedom to choose their own material to refer to, most of the students felt glad since they can choose the model to their liking. However, several students still found it difficult to search for the material based on the topic since not all of the topics were covered in the videos they made the references to. But, being able to choose their own material to their own liking really helped them improve their knowledge of conversation in several topics in daily life context.

From the questionnaires can be inferred that the students were still facing difficulties in finding company in learning speaking, especially native English speakers. Adding the data from the interview, although they were confident in speaking, most of the time, they were using text to chat to foreigners through several means of communication through the internet. However, the students also tried one of the ways to communicate through video chat, since not all the foreigners liked to have video chat, the students chose to use a special platform which was Ome.tv which used video chat as the way to communicate. From this situation, the students really got the benefit in their learning speaking. Not only could they improve their speaking, practicing speaking with natives also improved their confidence to talk to strangers. However, the students faced difficulties in finding foreigners who wanted to continuously become their practice buddies and made corrections in their speaking. Therefore, the students found a way of doing self-correction by looking at the dictionary or looking at the video available on the internet on how to say certain expressions. In this way, the students could substitute the lack of correction from foreigners while practicing speaking by looking at the video beforehand.

The interview also shed more light to the students’ opinion towards the involvement in choosing the material to refer to in the speaking class. Most of the students felt glad that they had a chance to search for the materials by themselves since they can enrich their knowledge not only by the videos they found themselves, but also from the videos their peers found. The small portion of the material given by the teacher helped them as the bridge to focus on what videos they should find. However, not all the students found it easy to search for videos on the internet. Several students had difficulties in finding the videos based on the topic since not all topics had the video example to the students liking. However, the students can substitute with any video available on the internet and even if they could not find the video with sufficient length of conversation, they could still benefit from it. They could use the video as the model so they can add more conversation by themselves. In conclusion, the freedom in finding the material for the speaking class added with the topic to discuss as well as the examples from the teacher made the students get more knowledge and experience in searching the material on the internet. The students did not feel lost since they had guidelines as they searched the videos by relying on the topic being discussed at the given time.

Conclusion
As one of the four skills in English which needs not only ample time but also a high frequency of practice to master, speaking is deemed as the skill that is relatively hard to master. Not only focused on the language features, the students also need to master how to deliver them in the real communication context thus engaging in real communication context would likely help them a lot in honing their speaking ability (Thornbury, 2005:28). Therefore, exposing the students with native English would likely help them a lot to improve their speaking ability as well as their listening skills.
Several things can be drawn from the results of the study, first, the students were still having difficulties in finding the native English speakers. However, the difficulties shifted from the previous one that they had difficulties to connect to native English speakers, to the difficulties to find the native English speakers who wanted to be their speaking buddy. Since the vast technological improvement and the pandemic, the students were more exposed to technology especially communication technology over the internet thus finding native English speakers to talk to was no longer difficult. The second was the students’ freedom in finding the material for their speaking class was favorable since they had more chance to find interesting videos to their liking on the internet. Having the topic being discussed in the class made them keep on track in their journey in finding the videos as the speaking class material. However, not all topics could be found in the videos, so the students struggled to find videos which contained parts of the topic and then create their own dialogue based on the videos they found. This notion really encouraged the students to be creative not only in terms of finding the videos they needed on the internet, but also in terms of overcoming the difficulties if they could not find the videos they were finding.

Therefore, it was essential to let the students experience the material development of the speaking class by giving them freedom to search for the material related to the topic being discussed in the class. However, the lecturers should be aware that giving guidance and limitations of what the students should find were essential to keep the students on the right track.

References