

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SMALL TALK STRATEGY IN SPEAKING AT LANGUAGES DEVELOPMENT CENTER CLASS

Drs. Saadillah, M.Pd

Nur Laila Kadariyah, S. Ag., M.Pd

Hidayah Nor, M. Pd

Encouraging students to speak English regularly is always a challenging task for English teachers, especially in EFL Context. Implementing a routine conversation can be an alternative for eradicating such problem. This research speaking at Language Development Center Class. There were 42 students, studied English at Language Service Center at IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin, participated in this study. The data collected by conducting observation, a spoken test, in form of interview, in the end of semester. In addition, the students' responses toward the technique used were also recorded by giving questionnaire. Findings revealed that the students who used to expose themselves in a routine activity, namely small talk, achieved better score in their speaking test than those who did not. Their responses toward this activity were also positive. This article is expected to be beneficial for teachers who are interested in applying small talk activity in English classroom.

Keywords: The implementation, Small Talk strategy , Speaking

INTRODUCTION

Good communication skills are needed in everyday life, in study at college or university, and in any career based on such studies. Yet, after more than twelve years at school, many students entering higher education are unable to express their thoughts clearly and effectively in foreign language. They need to improve their speaking and to develop their ability to converse, to discuss, to argue persuasively, and to speak in public. Indeed, employers complain that after a further three years in college or university, many students applying for employment still have poor communication skills. Recognizing that many school leavers need to improve their communication skills (and to develop other interpersonal skills needed for success in study and in any profession), all courses

in further and higher education are intended to facilitate both learning and personal development. As a student, therefore, you will have opportunities to discuss your work and to give short talks or presentations. That is to say, you will be encouraged to develop your ability to express your thoughts effectively. Most people probably take for granted their ability to speak, not thinking much about it until they have to address an audience or attend an important interview. But just as your first impressions of other people are based on how they look and how they speak – so are their impressions of you. Every time you speak, not just when giving a talk or being interviewed, you are both conveying information relevant to the subject being discussed and presenting yourself. When you meet people for the first time their immediate feelings about you, based on your appearance and behavior, are important both at the time and later – because they are not easily forgotten or revised. You never have a second opportunity to make a good first impression; and those people whom you meet only once may never have further evidence of your character and ability.

However, encouraging students to speak English regularly is always a challenging task for English teachers, especially in EFL Context. It is because we have limited access to use our English in non native English environment. The only one common environment for students to converse in English is in the classroom. Thus, implementing a routine conversation can be an alternative for eradicating such problem. Small talk as one of routine activities can be used as strategy to make students more active and provide a more non-threatening environment for them to speak since the students practice their speaking with their friends using common topics for them.

Small talk is an aspect of conversation that one might be encountered with nearly in every culture. In the greatest part of the English-speaking world, it is normal and even necessary to make small talk in various situations, especially when people meet for the first time and barely know each other. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2000) and Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (2002) define small talk as light and polite conversation on ordinary, unimportant or non-serious subject that occurs at a

social occasion. Another definition of small talk describes this idiomatic expression as an “informal discourse not covering any functional topics of conversation or any transactions that need to be addressed”. Although it might seem that small talk is something not very important and superficial, it serves two primary functions: it helps to avoid awkward pauses during the conversation and helps engage the other party in a deeper level of conversation as in many cultures silent moments between two people.

Small talk can be used as a technique for teaching speaking. Previous research showed that it contributed significant effect on learners’ speaking ability. Luk (2003) investigated the use of small talk between teacher and students. She found that this technique worked and were able to develop students’ interactional competence. She noticed that participants in small talk are free to show their individuality and creativity within a loose kind of frame, or sets of rules for talk. Then, Hunter (2011) observed small talk as the way to develop students’ fluency, accuracy, and complexity. He did a quasi of experimental research using three group: adult learners and young learners groups as experimental group and another adult learners group as control group. The result of his research yielded that the best effect showed in adult learners group. Their fluency, accuracy, and complexity significantly increase meanwhile the young learners group got benefit most in fluency and little in accuracy. Baranovskaja and Pavel Skorupa (2011) talked about some aspects of culture teaching in foreign language and ESP classes: cultural scripts and small talk. The result that small talk bring cultural values to the classroom which creates a more communicative situation. Although these research showed positive effect, however it is not easy to find another research discuss further about the use or the effect of this technique on other contexts of teaching and learning.

Based on the above consideration, the present study tried to investigate the effect of Small Talk in speaking by implementing at Languages Development Center class . It is different with the previous study on speaking in terms of the method used and the level of the learners and the context of the study. The subjects of the study were Students of Language Development Center of IAIN

Antasari Banjarmasin. They were chosen based on their ability in Speaking because they are in Acceleration Class and the researchers want to develop their ability in speaking. The small talk, then, was compared to conventional teaching of speaking to see whether or not the small talk significantly helps learners to improve their speaking ability. If the data gathered show that small talk can increase students' speaking ability, it will provide statistical evidence that this approach positively affects students' speaking ability. In contrast, if the data shows that this approach does not significantly help students to be more fluent speakers, it strengthens that conventional teaching of speaking is insufficient to train students' speaking skill. Therefore, the research problem in this research is: "How does the lecturer use the Small Talk Strategy in Speaking at Languages Development Center Class to help students have better speaking ability?" Related to the research problem, the objective of this study is to know "the implementation of Small Talk Strategy in Speaking at Languages Development Center Class to help students have better speaking ability".

METHOD

Research Design

The present research attempts to know the implementation of small talk strategy in speaking at Languages Development Center class. A descriptive study design is employed. The variable measured in this research was speaking ability which encompasses students' fluency, accuracy, and comprehensibility. The result of the posttest, then, was computed to see the implementation of that strategy.

This research is also conducted by collecting the data through the use of questionnaires to describe various aspects of population in which participants are asked to answer certain questions.

The writer used descriptive method because they want to count the score of every student which is gotten from the implementation of small talk strategy, which the scale of the number is one to five. The data then interpret based on the

mean score and percentage by the writer words. This method is used to describe students' responses on the use of strategy.

Babbie (2010) argues that Quantitative methods emphasize on objective measurements and numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires or surveys. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people.

He also states that Quantitative research designs are either descriptive (subjects usually measured once) or experimental (subjects measured before and after a treatment). A descriptive study establishes only associations between variables. An experiment establishes causality.

The process of experimentation could simply be seen in the following table.

Table 1 Quasi-Experimental Posttest-Only Design

| Group | Independent Variable | Post test |
|-------|----------------------|----------------|
| E | X | Y ₂ |
| C | - | Y ₂ |

Adapted from Creswell (2012: 310).

Terms and symbols:

- E : refers to Experimental group which practices speaking using small talk.
- C : refers to Control group which practices speaking using conventional method.
- X : refers to the treatment given in the Experimental group that is the implementation of small talk activity.
- Y₂ : refers to posttest in the form of interview.

While the use of qualitative method because the writers will analyze and infer the data narratively with the writers' words. This method used to describe lecturers' ways in implementing the small talk strategy which is analyzed from students' comments and result of students' responses in the questionnaire, and also interview to ensure students comment.

Students got a chance to practice their speaking using small talk strategy in every first fifteen minutes of each meeting. The topic for small talk was

determined by teacher. The topic could be about previous lesson or what they were going to learn.

The small talk implemented by using line up or onion ring technique. By using them, every student got a peer to talk. Every 3 minutes, the teacher would say change and the students needed to move and looked for another partner to talk about the same topic. During nine minutes, students talked to 3 partners. After that the teacher would stop the small talk and then chose in random four to five students to present in front of the class the result of their conversation.

The subjects of the study are the two groups of students at Language Center IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin. It is located at Jl. A. Yani, KM. 4.5, Banjarmasin. The Language Center has responsibility to develop students' language ability both English and Arabic. Every freshman needs to take two semesters English and Arabic course at that institution. Students take English course for three days in the morning for an hour and a half. There are sixty classes nowadays and it is ranked based on the result of placement test.

The first and the second groups consist of forty-four students, which come from various faculties and departments. In detail, the first and the second groups have the same amount of students, i.e. twenty-two for each class. Both are mixed classes since some students comes from English department and some are not. However, it is ensured that they have homogenous ability in English based on the result of placement test done by the Language Center.

In term of data collection, the primary data is collected by spoken test, and the secondary data is from questionnaire. The test is administered to both the experimental and the control group. Meanwhile, the questionnaire is utilized in experimental group alone.

Dealing with the data analysis, there were two different kinds of primary and secondary data that are analyzed. Therefore, they are treated and analyzed in different ways.

The primary data are gained from the result of the posttest. It is analyzed quantitatively to see the effect of treatment. The scores of the students in the experimental group and the control group are recorded and tabulated separately.

To answer the research questions whether the students who are taught using Small Talk activities have better speaking ability than those are taught without using Small Talk, the researcher analyzed the data as called descriptive statistics first. In this study, it is conducted to see minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard deviation. After doing data analysis, the result is presented in graphic forms. The scores are statistically analyzed by using SPSS program 20.0.

For the purpose of hypothesis testing, the researchers need to fulfill the statistical assumptions to determine what types of test will be employed. Homogeneity, normality and linearity testing should be conducted first. The criteria of acceptance or rejection of the assumptions in the present study was level of significance .05 (95% percent confidence).

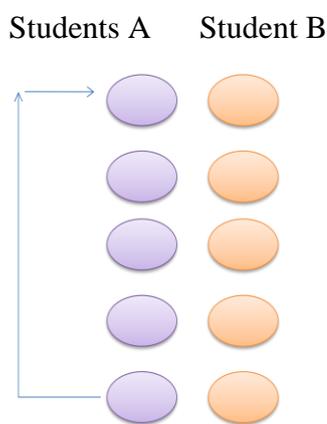
When all of the assumptions are met, the researcher will use parametric statistical analysis to analyze the data. Parametric testing used in this study is independent-samples t-test, which is a data analysis system used to test the difference between two groups' means (Lodico, Spaulding, &Voegtle, 2010:258). If it is not fulfilled, the researcher will use non-parametric statistical analysis to analyze the data. For the non-parametric analysis, the researcher will apply Mann-Whitney test, which is an analogue non-parametric procedure to independent sample t-test (McMillan, 1992: 204).

After that the hypothesis in this research will be tested by formulating the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis (H_0) is the students who practice their speaking through small talk activities have better speaking ability than those who do not. The post test scores are used to reject or not to reject H_0 . The criterion of rejection or acceptance is a level of significance .05 which is considered acceptable in field of education.

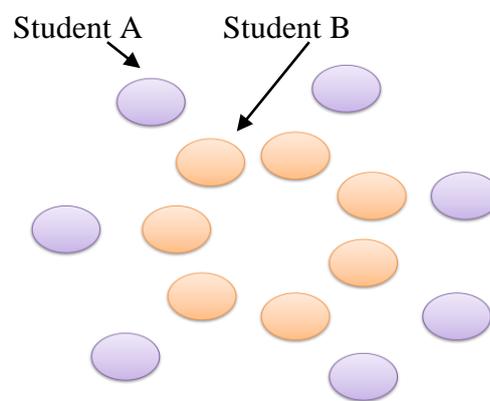
Treatment

Treatment for the Experimental group was Small Talk as a routine. This group got a chance to practice their speaking in every first fifteen minutes of meetings. The topic for small talk determine by teacher. The topic could be about previous lesson or what they were going to learn.

The small talk implemented by using line up or onion ring technique. See Picture 2 and 3 to get a clear picture about these technique. By using them, every student got a peer to talk. Every 3 minutes, the teacher would say change and the students needed to move and looked for another partner to talk about the same topic. During nine minutes, students talked to 3 partners. After that the teacher would stop the small talk and the chose in random four to five students to present in front of the class the result of their conversation.



Picture 1: Line Up technique



Picture 2: Onion Ring technique

Meanwhile, in the control group, the students learned speaking by using conventional way. They learned by practicing dialogues provided by teachers or made by themselves. Both group got these treatment during a semester (42 meetings).

The Result of Posttest of the Experimental and Control Groups

The main data in this study was the students' speaking test scores of Experimental and Control Group which were obtained from the posttest. After giving a different treatment to both groups for forty-two meetings, posttest was administered in the forty-second meeting. The treatment given to the Experimental group was small talk activity, while to the Control group was conventional teaching method.

The posttest of the Experimental group was conducted on the same day and date. It was conducted on Tuesday, May 13, 2014. To be more specific, the test was given at 07.45-08.15 a.m. for the Experimental group and 11.45-13.15 p.m. for the Control Group. All students in both classes joined the test. The result of posttest of both groups can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for the Result of Posttest

| No. | | Mean | SD | Min. Score | Max. Score |
|-----|--------------------|-------|-------|------------|------------|
| 1. | Experimental Group | 90.68 | 1.701 | 87 | 93 |
| 2. | Control Group | 88.23 | 3.176 | 80 | 95 |

The result of posttest showed that the mean scores for the speaking test for the Experimental group was higher than that of the mean scores obtained by the Control group. The mean score of Experimental group in the speaking test was 90.68 and the average score of the Control Group was 88.23. See Figure 1 to better understand the difference between the results of posttest from each group.

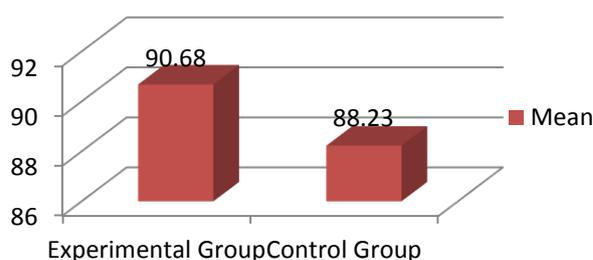


Figure 1 The Mean Difference Between Experimental and Control Group in the Posttest

Looking at a glance, training students' speaking ability using small talk activity as routine gave a better effect on their speaking ability. However, this could not be claimed before the statistical hypothesis was done. For further analysis to answer the research problem, a statistical analysis was conducted.

The first step needs to complete in the process of analyzing data for hypothesis testing is to carry out homogeneity, normality, and linearity testing as the fulfillment of the statistical assumptions. The data utilized for the fulfillment of statistical assumption were the primary data obtained from the result of the speaking posttest. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.0.

The result of analysis showed that the observed significance level or the *p-value* for homogeneity test was .032 for the students' speaking test score. It meant that they were not homogenous. Then, the result of normality testing on both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that the calculated significance value (z-value) of the data obtained from the Experimental group speaking test scores were not greater than .05 but the Control group's scores were. The z-value for speaking test scores of Experimental group was .001 and the z-value of the Control Group was 1.09. It meant that one of the obtained data did not follow normal dispersion. Next, The result of linearity testing for the reading rate score of the Experimental and Control groups was .754. It meant that the observed significance level was greater than the significance level that the researcher used in this study, which is .05. Thus, it indicated that there was a linear relationship among the reading rate scores of the groups.

Since the result showed that some of the data in homogeneity and normality testing were not fulfilled so that the researcher is better to use non-parametric tests. The analysis used was Mann-Whitney. It is a data analysis system to test mean difference of two groups if the statistical assumption (homogeneity or normality) was not fulfilled (McMillan, 1992: 204).

Before doing the hypothesis testing, the researcher set the null as well as the alternative hypotheses. Here are the statements of both hypotheses:

H₀: The students who practice their speaking through small talk activity have better speaking ability than those who do not.

H₁: The students who practice their speaking through small talk activity do not have better speaking ability than those who do not.

As mentioned earlier, Mann-Whitney was used to test the hypothesis. The significance level used was 5%. The result was presented in Table 3.

Table 3 The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Speaking Test Scores

Ranks

| | Group | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|-------|------------|----|-----------|--------------|
| Score | Experiment | 22 | 28.45 | 626.00 |
| | Control | 22 | 16.55 | 364.00 |
| | Total | 44 | | |

Test Statistics^a

| | Score |
|------------------------|---------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 111.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 364.000 |
| Z | -3.114 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .002 |

a. Grouping Variable: Group

Based on the result of the test, the output rank showed that the mean for Experimental group was higher than the Control group ($28.45 > 16.55$). The Mann Whitney U test value (Sig. 2-tailed) was $.002 < .05$. Because the result of the statistics was significant, it meant that we could not accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant different between students who practice their speaking through small talk than those do not. Further analyzing, the descriptive statistic

showed that the mean scores of the Experimental group was higher than the Control group's scores ($90.68 > 88.23$), it supported the conclusion that they had better speaking ability. In term of minimum and maximum scores for the speaking scores, the Experimental group's minimum score was 87 and maximum score was 93. Meanwhile, in the Control group, the minimum score was 80 and the maximum score was 95. Therefore, based on the statistical computation, those points were quite significant to justify that the Experimental group speaking ability was better than the Control group speaking ability.

The Result Questionnaire of Students' Attitude toward the Small Talk

The students' opinions were used to check the students' attitude toward the small talk implemented in this study. Six questions were delivered to the students experiencing the activity. The summary of the students' answers were presented in Table 4.

Table 4 The Summary of Students' Answers and Its Interpretation

| Variable | Students' Response | | | Total |
|--|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------|
| | Positive | Not Clear | Negative | |
| 1. General Impression towards Small Talk | 100 % | 0 % | 0 % | 100% |
| 2. Good things of Small Talk | 100 % | 0 % | 0 % | 100% |
| 3. Benefits of the Small Talk | 100 % | 0 % | 0 % | 100% |
| 4. The Weaknesses of Small Talk | 45.45 % | 9.09 % | 45.45 % | 100% |
| 5. The students' recommendation for using Small Talk | 100 % | 0 % | 0 % | 100% |
| Total | 440.9 88.18 % | 13.64 2.73% | 45.45 9.09 % | |

In brief, the result of questionnaire showed most of the students had positive attitude towards this technique and they also gained some benefits on improving their speaking skill.

DISCUSSION

The result of final data analysis showed that the implementation of small talk strategy promoted students' ability to become more fluent in speaking. It showed by their speaking scores which was higher than those who were taught without using that strategy.

According to the theory, small talk refers to communication that primarily serves the purpose of social interaction. Small talk consists of short exchanges that usually begin with a greeting, move to back and forth exchange on non-controversial topics such as the weekend, the weather, work, school, etc., and then often conclude with a fixed expression such as *See you later*. These patterned and formulaic chunks, then, help students to become more fluent because those chunks become familiar with them and finally it can be spoken out automatically. Since the small talk activity in this research had been applied for a semester (42 meetings) so it can be said that the students acquired many formulaic chunks that help them to be a more fluent speaker.

By asking students to do this activity in every meeting, they became familiar with speaking. They also built such as good social relationship with their friends. This condition then makes them feel confidence to speak and to express their opinion while talking. This finding in line with what Luk (2003) found that small talk can develop students interactional competence.

Small Talk began as an experiment in learner-centered, reflective teaching of oral communication over 20 years ago and has developed into a comprehensive approach to developing accuracy, fluency, and complexity in oral production. In a 'Small Talk' session, students use their communicative ability in conversation without intervention by the teacher, and then receive feedback. Therefore, most students feel more comfortable to speak. Small talk creates a nonthreatening environment for them to express their thoughts. In the present research, teacher did not interference students talk. He just went around the class to make sure that every student talked.

Small Talk is effective in increasing the students' pragmatic competence since it gives them an opportunity to practice speaking in a relatively low-stress environment, the kinds of speech acts they would need in higher stress interactions outside the classroom. It also puts students in the position, as leaders, to practice a variety of speech acts and discourse management strategies that are usually restricted to the teacher. Small Talk is very popular with students, in addition, at least from teachers' untested observations, it is very effective in raising the level of fluency of the students in general. The teacher also noticed that small talk encouraged not only extrovert students to talk but also the introvert ones.

However, from the minor findings, it also noted that teachers need to give space among students while they are talking. In the present research, because the space among pairs was too close, some students criticized that it was so noisy so they could not hear what his/ her partners talk. They also recommended that it is better to talk about topic they have learnt in the previous meeting rather than talking about the present topic for that day meeting since they had limited vocabulary.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the result of statistical computation, it was found that there was significant difference between the speaking ability of the students' who were taught using small talk with those who were taught without using small talk. Thus, based on this result, it could be concluded that the implementation of small talk is recommended to facilitate students to become more fluent in speaking.

Regarding the results of this research, some suggestions are proposed. First, the suggestion goes to a comprehensive program in small talk instruction, the researcher recommends using a variety of methods in teaching speaking by using small talk.

Second, the suggestion goes to the teachers/lecturers who want to use Small Talk in the teaching and learning process of speaking class. Teachers may need to introduce the concept of small talk to students and make students familiar with the small talk.

Last, the suggestion goes to the future researchers who can also explore the techniques of teaching speaking beside small talk and its effect on students' test performance. It will be also interesting to examine the relationship between students' proficiency in English and their level of education in speaking because it might be the case that learners with various proficiency levels may have different preferences for teachers' technique in teaching speaking. They can also use this research as a starting point.

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