



IMPROVING INDONESIAN STUDENTS SPEAKING SKILL THROUGH ENGLISH DORMITORY

Jalaluddin

English Education Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa

Email: jalaluddin@stkipparacendekianw.ac.id

Abstract

Most recently, speaking skill has become the most prioritized skill taught to Indonesian learners. The reason of this is simply to prepare the learners to compete in global world. Despite many theories and literatures have been proposed to address the effective ways of teaching speaking skill, no satisfactory result has been achieved. One of practical strategies is English Dormitory Activity (EDA). EDA is very effective to increase the learners' spoken ability for three main reasons. First, the participants are immersed fully in an English environment during EDA. Second, the program triggers learners' willingness to communicate in English. Lastly, it offers more practical speaking skill to students.

Keywords: EDA, English Teaching, Speaking Skill, Communicative Skill

INTRODUCTION

Since 19th century the rapid growth of modernization has caused the increasing demand of mastering English as a global language for communication purposes. As a result, the attention of English teaching professionals has gradually changed from too much focusing on reading and writing skill to listening and speaking skills. Most recently, speaking skill has become the most prioritized one on the eyes of English teacher around the world. The reason of this is simply to prepare the learners to compete in global world. However, despite many theories and literatures have been proposed to address the effective ways of teaching speaking skill, no satisfactory result has been achieved so far (Junying, 2006). This phenomenon has spread out to almost all countries where English status is either as a second or foreign language including Indonesia.

The issue of ineffectiveness of teaching speaking skill in Indonesia can be examined from the fact that oral expressions performed by the learners after their graduation from high school is generally unsatisfactory. In the other words, speaking skill gained by the students after studying for more than six years, starting from elementary to high school level, is considered still not eligible for communication purpose. Dardjowidjojo (2000) claims that a high school graduate in Indonesia is still not able to communicate in English intelligibly. This phenomenon still happens in many schools to date. Besides being caused by low teachers' competency and limited resources, low level of learners' speaking skill is, to a great extent, rooted from the learners' attitude toward English learning such as low motivation, laziness, less confidence, etc. More practical strategies should be proposed and applied to support the effort of improving the students' oral ability. One of the effective programs is English Dormitory Activity (EDA). It is believed that EDA is very effective to increase the learners' spoken ability for three main reasons. First, the participants are immersed fully in an English



environment during EDA. Second, the program triggers learners' willingness to communicate in English. Lastly, it offers more practical speaking skill to students.

THE ADVANTAGES OF EDA

English Dormitory Activity (EDA) is a program mainly arranged to promote English learning activities in a particular area. The location of the program can be anywhere as long as it is comfortable and supportive for learning circumstance. Various indoor and outdoor learning processes are introduced in this program where all of them are merely intended to engage the students in attractive learning atmosphere. This program can be organized for students or public depending on the participants' need such as for academic purpose, tourism, business, etc. Generally, EDA can be set up to promote one of four English skills; reading, listening, writing, or speaking, or to teach all of those skills together simultaneously.

So far, many English dormitory programs have been organized in some places across the world. One of them which has been considered successful is an English dormitory activity held in a University in China (Junying, 2006). The program was set up for college freshmen who voluntarily registered before commencing their college study. Some special treatments such as a broad opportunity to speak with native speakers sent by the university as well as intensive guidance from local and English language teachers were provided for the students in this program. Another example of English dormitory activity is one organized in Zhejiang Gongshang University (Zhuang, 2010). Different from the first one, this program was set up to promote autonomous learning on the students. Similarly, it has been found that the participants' speaking skill in both programs improved significantly. In the next paragraph, three essential success factors of EDA toward the students oral ability, as mentioned previously, are examined.

First of all, EDA setting enables learners to immerse in an English environment. Since the basic rule of EDA obliges all dormitory inhabitants to communicate in English only and all facilities instruction are written in English, the students are fully immersed in the target language environment. All activities such as morning exercise, breakfast, sport, study group, cooking must be in English. Many have claimed that immersion program has been successful to give positive impact on the learners' speaking skill. Immersion program provides natural-like atmosphere of the target language. This made up natural setting positively enhances the learners' speaking skill. This is supported by Junying (2006) indicating that a maximum result of teaching speaking skill can be achieved by setting up a natural English milieu. In addition, even in classroom teaching activity creating the target language setting by using it as a medium of instruction is a powerful approach to boost pupils' spoken skill. Potowski (2004) contends that English is best learned and mastered by the students if it is a medium of instruction rather than as the focused content. This is highly supported by Jacobs (1978) in a study of an American foreign language immersion who claims that children are successful to attain considerable proficiency in the target language as well as master their regular subjects at school in which in this program the students were taught by using French as a medium of instruction. These findings provide strong indication that although the target language does not function as the main learning focus, it can be mastered by the learners since they are immersed in the language setting. A number of research on immersion



program at school have proved the same positive impact on the learners' speaking skill such as Padilla et al. (2013), Christian (1996), Badstubner & Ecke (2009), Burkhauser et al. (2016), and Trentman (2013).

Secondly, the next positive impact of EDA on the students' speaking skill is the improvement of willingness to speak. Basically, students with high level of speaking skill have been successful to establish their habit of speaking. The speaking habit is rooted from willingness to use the target language as a means of communication as frequent as possible. It has been a big challenge in second language (L2) learning context to encourage the students' willingness to communicate in the target language. In the first step, the students feel difficult to express their thought freely due to lack of vocabulary mastery and inaccuracy of grammatical usage. Another factor is some unfamiliar topics which often tie the students tongue and this is getting worse when they are getting nervous to speak (Zhuang, 2010). It is easily speculated that the main cause of this trouble is the lack of target language exposure.

In relation to learning trouble above, Baker and MacIntyre (2003) have conducted a comparative study between non-immersion students group and immersion one. They found out that immersion students reveal higher willingness to communicate in comparison with their peers. As a matter of fact, since immersion program is applied in EDA, many factors have contributed to the students' willingness to speak such as instrumental and integrative factors which encompass close relationships with tutors, supervisors and the other participants (Wesely, 2009). However, the later one, integrative factor, can be considered as more influential on the learners' speaking improvement. The longer the students and teacher stay together, the closer their relationship will be and this closeness is very essential to break a certain barrier of communication. However, the student-teacher relationship is, to a certain extent, blocked by a long belief in Indonesian culture that students should not speak too much with their teachers because it is considered impolite. Rather than talking critically and give rebuttal to a particular issue, they tend to only listen and follow what their teachers instruct. To my point of view, this culture is very valuable to depend and apply when teaching students about morality including the feeling of respect, courtesy, and obedience. In contrast, in introducing learners with a new language such students' feeling of "too obedient" should be reduced to promote talking activeness in the target language. It does not mean to discourage the importance of obedience but, at the same time, the students should also be encouraged to be critical and active. Being critical and active is widely emphasized in EDA and this leads to the willingness to speak. Furthermore, immersion program concept applied in EDA is effectual to promote interactive atmosphere of study such as cooperative learning and peer coaching (Christian, 1996). In EDA concept, every learners' mistake is highly valued as a process of study. This condition results in an increase of students' confidence to practice as well as a decrease of anxiety to use the language outside the classroom (Badstubner & Ecke, 2009). It is also important to highlight that, based on psychological point of view, the students' comfort to talk in the target language rises when they are surrounded by the language environment (MacIntyre, Burns & Jessome, 2011; Jalaluddin, 2015). Accordingly, these fundamental factors such as activeness, confidence, and comfort all together contribute to the learners' willingness to use the target language for

communication.

The students' willingness to speak is also affected by the autonomous learning promoted in EDA. Autonomous learning can be defined as the learners' ability in managing their learning strategies independently without too much relying on their teachers or their parents (Zhuang, 2010). This ability includes the strategies to manage their time, determine the learning goal, find out creative ways to master the materials, become initiative in their learning, and evaluate their own progress. This ability is essential to strengthen the consistency of students' learning during their entire time. In EDA, students stay by their own without direct guidance from their family. Although students are instructed to work cooperatively in their study, the teachers give broad opportunity for them to determine their own strategies. In the other words, they are highly trained to be responsible for their own study and ultimate goal. To a great extent, this triggers their willingness to practice.

The last valuable point is EDA promotes practical speaking skill to students. The first reason of this is the regular presence of teachers or supervisors in various conditions during the program enables more often conversation taking place between teachers and students. In this case, it is highly expected that the teacher use the language as natural as possible based on the context. Jacobs (1978) contends that many other students are able to see the practical use of target language when he talked with one of them. Hence, students can benefit from both their own practice and their teachers talk. In addition, this direct observation, to some extent, provides persistent visual and auditory stimulation of the target language use for the learners (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003). This sort of simulation is what language learners actually need to boost their communicative ability. Above all, non-linguistic elements such as attitudes, motivation, anxiety, and satisfaction with experience promoted during EDA also contributes a lot to practical skill. Accordingly, this factors offer large opportunities for them to actively take part in conversation in more comfortable ways. More importantly, maximum outcome can be achieved when the students feel accepted and appreciated (Potowski, 2004).

Actualization of the theory gained at school is another form of practical practice in EDA. The learners have more opportunity to study together and practice what they have learnt at school (Jalaluddin, 2015). As I mention previously, materials taught in EDA can be arranged in such a way to meet close correlation with the school curriculum. Since the school time is very limited, the pupils sometimes do not get chance to do more practice in English. Hence, the theoretical perspectives they learn from school can be implemented practically in EDA setting.

POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES OF EDA

However, many people may see some possible drawbacks of immersion strategy applied in EDA. These drawbacks may be considered to cause ineffectiveness of students' achievement in speaking skill. Firstly, it is not an easy task to find qualified teachers who are able to demonstrate a high level of oral skills in a non-English country like Indonesia. Being qualified refers to the speaking ability is close to native speakers. Besides, the teachers should be easily understandable and exemplified by the EDA participants. Teacher is seen the most

crucial party in EDA as the main source of students to measure their progress in study. It is also no less important that the teachers should have good natural pedagogical ability. They are demanded to understand the students' characteristics and choose the best teaching approach. Secondly, it may also be considered that EDA lacks of culture of English-speaking country. People may believe that the learners have high expectation to involve in western culture and this is an encouraging aspect of learning a second language. In the other words, the absence of cultural background may lead to less effective outcome. The next potential limitation that may be addressed by many people may be the issue of students' inconsistency in using the target language. It is highly challenging for the teachers to make sure the students always keep using the target language in any activity in EDA. It is because teachers or supervisors cannot be always there during 24 hours to control and monitor their activity. Moreover, the learners' entire environment outside EDA is not English. As a result, when they come back home, go to the market, or interact with friends from the other areas they may not find the target language use. This fact may reduce the students' motivation to learn the language as they find no benefit in their real life. To some extent, the people may assume that this is one of serious issues that may discourage the learners from mastering a sufficient speaking skill in the target language. The last possible demerit is that the participants' oral skill has lack of grammatical accuracy, lexical appropriateness, less native-like pronunciation and too simple structure. The possible cause of this is the influence of mother tongue structure.

Although the limitations of immersion program proposed above seem to be true in some respects, in EDA they can be anticipated by doing some preventive actions. Firstly, teachers or supervisors who will stay and guide the students during 24 hours in EDA will be selectively chosen from those who have a lot of teaching experience. Moreover, the understanding of Indonesian culture and characteristics is highly considered in the selection process. To help the teachers, some assistants can be recruited to establish teamwork. The teachers and assistants' number will vary depending on the number of students with the expectation at about 10:1 of student-teacher ratio. This ratio will minimize the chance of being inconsistency in using the target language during EDA. Dealing with the inevitable influence from environment outside EDA, a strict rule can be set up to limit students' interaction with the outside circumstance except on free days. The rule should be also announced to any comer who wants to visit the participants in EDA to remind them that they are in an English area. Another preventive action can be by making sure that the students do not have free access to the communication tools such as mobile phone, iPad, etc except for urgent condition. To fulfill the need of introducing native-like pronunciation and conversation, every month native speakers can be invited to involve in various activities with students (Zhuang, 2010). Their presence can be, at the same time, benefitted to introduce the western culture. Additionally, to make the students feel a strong sense of western culture atmosphere, the area of EDA can be made up in such a way that resembles English-speaking country setting. Therefore, by incorporating these strategies all possible limitations of EDA can be minimized.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, there are three important factors that promote the



effectiveness of EDA is on the students' speaking improvement. Struggling on teaching activity to maximize the learners' speaking skill outcome, supporting environment should be considered. It can be examined that EDA provides very ideal supporting milieu since it adopts immersion strategy. In addition, willingness to communicate as another crucial factor in determining the learners' speaking improvement is offered during the EDA. It is undeniable that willingness to speak is a starting point that leads to increasing speaking skill. Lastly, the essence of practical skill that is necessary to maximize the learners potential of speaking skill is promoted in EDA. Although some issues may occur to hinder the success of EDA, appropriate preventive strategies can be applied to anticipate them. Acknowledging that these three factors are among the basic pillars of underpinning the success of teaching speaking skill to students, all stakeholders must consider to direct the students to involve in an activity that promote those factors.

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