Integrating Short Conversation and English Conversation Applications to Improve Students' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain the implementation of using short conversation and English conversation applications and also to describe student participation using this learning model. It employed a qualitative method. Classroom action research was used as the design for both cycles of the study. Planning, carrying out, monitoring, and debriefing were the four stages that make up each cycle. Participants in the study were 39 third-semester students from the Arabic education department at an Islamic university in Central Java, Indonesia, during the academic year 2022/2023. Data collection techniques used observation, pre-test and post-test. The results of this study show that there is an improvement in every cycle of students' speaking competence using this learning model. They also are active, self-confidence and enthusiastic in joining this speaking class. It is recommended this strategy to overcome students' difficulties in speaking English.

Introduction

Speaking is considered the most special language skill. It is included as a productive skill besides writing. Meanwhile students often face difficulties in speaking English. Realizing students' problems, teachers should apply various learning methods, strategies, and media which are needed in EFL classrooms. They should make students enjoy speaking English without anxiety.

The development of one's oral communication skills should be a primary focus of instruction while learning a second language. The ability to communicate in a foreign language in a way that is both clear and effective is a factor that contributes to a learner's success both on campus and later on in every aspect of their lives. Because of this, language instructors are required to place a significant emphasis on the teaching of speaking skills. As a result, teachers should devise a variety of activities to encourage students to talk more, and they

should inspire students to acquire more knowledge about speaking abilities (Sihite, Zulkarnain & Suri, 2021; Wahyuni & Maulizan, 2021; Yiu & Chou, 2021). Teaching students for communication purposes is the ultimate goal of each speaking class they take. Therefore, the exercises that we do in our speaking class should center on how language is used personally. Not only is it necessary for the instructor to cultivate a friendly and humane environment in the classroom, but they must also provide every student an opportunity to express themselves.

In other words, one's ability to communicate effectively is regarded as the most essential factor in determining whether or not one will have a successful discussion. The learning methods and techniques are very important and needed in the classroom. They should choose the best model depending on the difficulties they face in the field of teaching speaking because many problems can occur in teaching speaking. It makes them unable to say the words during speaking, and being afraid to speak because it is considered a mispronunciation has resulted in students never trying to speak English. They are challenged to carry on a conversation smoothly with each other.

Based on the research, several factors initiate problems in teaching speaking skills. Teachers more often give written exercises in class and choose methods that make students uninterested in learning English. So that, students also think that English is difficult to learn. Nowadays, many teachers also choose to teach using various learning methods or techniques. So that students can do their final assignments with good grades, but they still lack practice in oral English communication.

Several techniques can help teachers to make students active in English. In this case, the researcher chose short conversation combined with English conversation application in speaking skills for students, because the researchers believe this technique can make students more interested in speaking English. After all, students must use their opinions and feelings and make them more interested in speaking English when communicating.

Having brief conversations is one of the learning strategies that may assist novice English language learners in constructing fundamental language knowledge. It comprises anything from six to twelve phrases and is conducted between two persons. Students will have more opportunities to express themselves verbally due to this exercise. Free communicative engagement is another name for this kind of contact. It indicates that pupils are permitted to speak on their own terms and discuss topics in their own manner. Conversation is a method of improving students' speaking which is focused on this research with the condition that students feel more motivated, so researchers combined the method with digital application media.

In the teaching-learning process, media is important things. Media is a tool to deliver messages or information from one place to another place. Besides that, to make the teaching-learning process joyful and fun, the teacher can use many media in the classroom. So, it can make the teaching and learning process will be more effective and highly significant. The teacher can use many kinds of media through visuals, sounds, smells, and tastes. So, the teacher can choose the appropriate media in the classroom. In this study, the researcher chose digital media, namely English conversation applications. This program is the beneficial tool to practice English conversation for everyone, with a large number of English conversations grouped in various levels so that English learners may perfect both their listening and speaking abilities in excellent English.

Furthermore, the use of short conversations combined with English conversation practice applications hopefully encourages students to speak English confidently. This study aims firstly to explain the implementation of integrating short conversation and English conversation application to improve students' speaking skills. Secondly, it purposes to describe students' participation in joining this speaking class taught using this learning model.

Digital education tools can be utilized in teaching speaking. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) brings flexibility and choice to education. In this case, teaching English needs a method to activate and improve the students' ability of four language skills. Technology gives students a chance to engage in self-directed actions. Teachers must follow the modern era, which is facilitated through the internet. The use of applications with the advantages of usability can be applied in teaching-learning process. They make learning English meaningful and funnier. Learning English using digital media is one way to enhance students' interest. Students do not have to sit in class when they want to learn English; they can study every day and everywhere. The conceptual framework is drawn as follows.
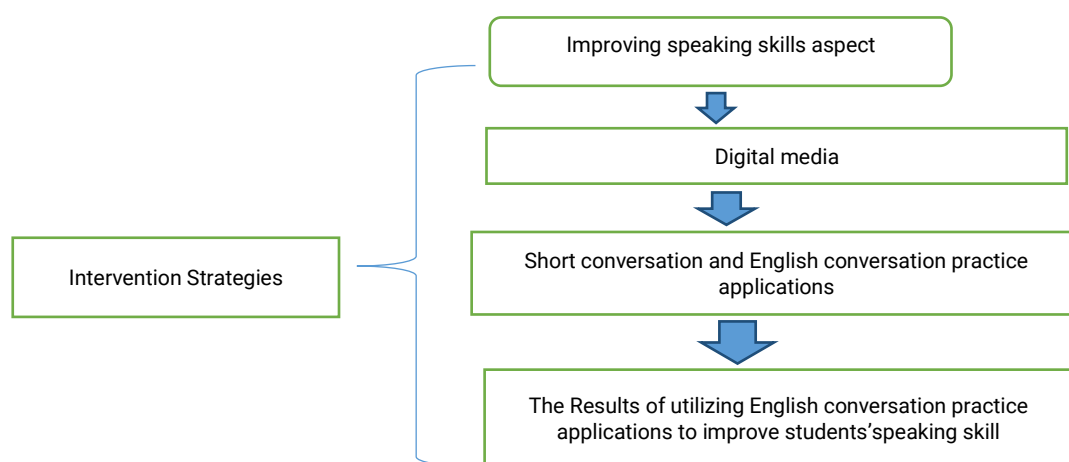
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Method

The research was conducted using qualitative methods. The methodology for the study consisted of two cycles of classroom action research. The findings of classroom action research are disclosed through action research, and this study is carried out in a classroom setting. The issues that students are having in their education are the focus of this study strategy's design. Cycles are used in classroom action research that has these qualities. The phases of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are repeated throughout each cycle. This is in line with (Arikunto, 2007; Burns, 2010; Efron, Ravid, 2013; McIntosh, 2010; Mettetal, 2001; Phillips & Car, 2014; Somekh, 2006). In this case, classroom action research was used to test the digital learning media to help students practice speaking. It was to solve students' speaking skill problems.
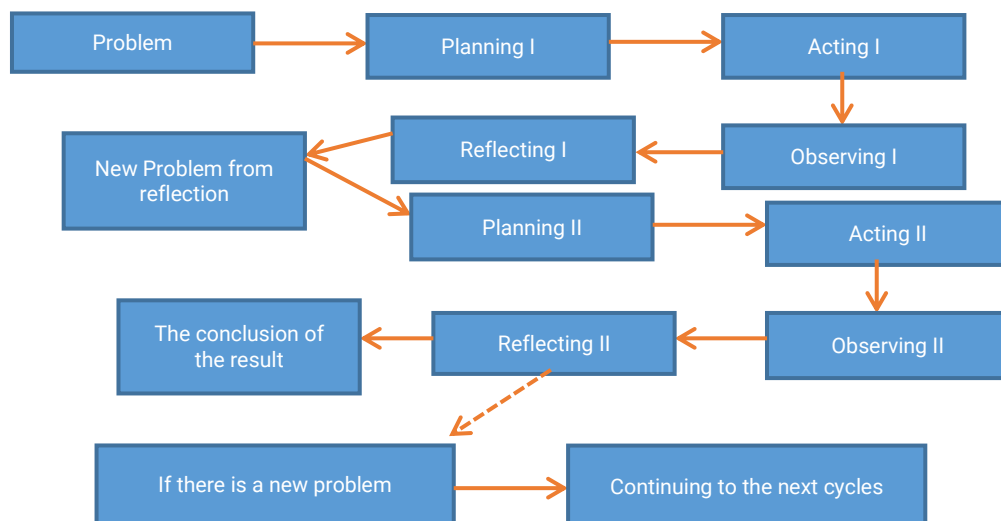

Figure 2. Classroom Action Research Model

The research participants were thirty-nine third-semester students of the Arabic Education Department at an Islamic University in Central Java, Indonesia, in the academic year 2022/2023. Data collection techniques used observation, interview, pre-test, and post-test. The research instruments used observation checklists, interview guidelines, and speaking assessment guidelines.

Research procedure

Before conducting the research, the researchers gave the pre-test. The purpose was to find out how highly the students can speak English by analyzing their conversation in front of the class with the topic of "Talking about Kids". In this phase, the students performed conversation role play based on the topic. They spoke based on their practice speaking ability before treatment in cycle 1. The researchers limited the conversation to not more than three

minutes for each pair. When the students were asked to speak in front of the class, they looked confused because they probably lacked self-confidence. The teacher-researcher and collaborators determined 20 groups. The learning model used role-plays. Each group was free to make a short conversation on the topic. In the pre-cycle, the research collaborators helped the teacher recorded students' conversation.

a. Cycle 1

Planning

In this phase, the researchers chose the learning materials: School. They designed the lesson plan based on the learning materials. They prepared observation checklists. The collaborators got ready to observe students' activities and attitudes toward the learning process.

Acting

The teacher provided students with speaking therapy. They used cycles of teaching and learning. Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF), Modelling of the Text (MoT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT) were the acronyms that were used to describe these processes as stated by (Spycher, 2017) use and outside the brackets (Andrews et al., 2021). The treatment used conversational role play to improve students' speaking skills.

- Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF)

  There were several activities in this step. Firstly, the researchers showed some pictures of schools' activities. Secondly, they made brainstorming to the students about school situation by asking some questions, for instance:

  Do you like go to school library?

  How often do you go to school canteen?

  What are your activities during school break?

  Do you like playing game together with your friends during school break?

  Do you discuss school assignments with your classmates during school break?

  Do you carry out activities in school organization?

  Finally, the teacher explained about school activities.

- Modeling of the Text (MoT)

  The teachers asked students to download English Conversation Practice Application from Play Store. This application has many examples of school

activities and conversations. Students started to select the short conversation. Lastly, she pointed out two students as the model to perform role-play conversations about school activities.

- Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT)

  The teachers made 20 groups in this class. Each group was asked to perform a short conversation about school activities. The students can take it from the application or make it themselves. The students practiced speaking together with their partners before the assessment.

- Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT)

  After they made some preparations, they performed role-play in front of the class. The teachers assessed students' performance role play conversation. The assessment had some indicators namely fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The post-test was conducted to measure students' speaking skills. The students created their own dialogues.

Observing

The researcher and the research collaborators observed students' activities using observation guidelines and checklists, collected the data, and monitored teaching speaking. The observation consisted of implementing short conversation combined with English Conversation application and students' responses to this learning model.

Reflecting

The researcher and collaborators analyzed and evaluated the treatment in cycle 1. They discussed students' results of the post-test. They still found students' problems in performing role-play, namely mispronunciation, lack of self-confidence, incorrect grammar, and in non-fluent speaking. Finally, they decided to continue the next cycle in order to achieve students' good results in speaking competence.

b. *Cycle 2*

Planning

The researchers designed a lesson plan which was implemented in cycle 2. The topic was the same as cycle 1, namely talking about school activities. They also made an observation checklist and students' assessments. The authentic assessment was conducted in every cycle and comprehensively related to students' cognitive, psychomotor and affective aspects.

Acting

In this phase, the researchers still conducted teaching speaking by implementing BKoF, MoT, JCoT, and ICoT. They gave samples of performing dialogues in role play to eliminate students' mispronunciation. Then they pointed out two students as the model. The researcher discussed with the students how to perform role play in nature and pronounce some unfamiliar words well. Finally, students prepared their dialogues to be presented in front of the class.

Observing

Students got ready to perform their role-play in groups. One group consisted of two students. The researchers gave assessment of their performance. The collaborators observed students' behavior concerning this learning model. They also took some photographs of the learning activities.

Reflecting

The last step was to evaluate students' results of their performances. Both of the researchers and collaborators discussed students' achievement of speaking competence. They concluded that students' achievement had some significant improvement. It meant the second cycle was enough.

Result

A pre-test was administered to each and every participant. Its purpose is to evaluate the level of oral communication experience that pupils already possess. The students' average score on the pre-test was 51. It was comprehensible since the majority of pupils lacked fluency, as seen by the long pauses and the many statements that were left incomplete. In addition to that, students often mispronounce words.

1. Analysis of the cycle 1

Planning

The teacher and research collaborators started to conduct the cycle 1. In this phase, they prepared all treatment equipment, such as lesson plans, observation checklists, and post-tests. The observations were also for students and researchers.

Acting

She gave the first treatment. Based on the research, all activities could run well. While explaining the learning materials, all of the students paid serious attention. They did not look nervous. They were happy and enjoyed it because they applied the digital media,

namely English Conversation Practice. The students were involved in speaking class by selecting the dialog. They also were very enthusiastic. The teacher also made an assessment by giving a post-test after giving treatment. The average score of the post-test in cycle 1 was 65.25. There was an improvement in students' speaking skills compared to pre-test results. Nevertheless, the score had not reached a passing grade yet.

Observing

The research collaborators examined students' engagement in following the cycle 1. They observed one by one student in applying the digital media. The students discussed with their partner to select the dialog from the application. After they chose the dialog, then they practiced speaking together with the partner.

Reflecting

The researcher used this phase to evaluate the results of cycle 1 treatment. Although they had already reached the achievement but the improvement still under the passing grade. Mostly students have problems of grammar and also pronunciation. Realizing this students' condition, the researcher and collaborators agreed to continue conducting cycle 2.

2. Analysis of the cycle 2

Planning

In this phase, the researchers prepared lesson plans as learning scenarios, assessment forms and observation guidelines.

Acting

This step was conducted by giving treatment to the students. The activities were almost the same as the previous cycle. In this meeting, students also performed role play. The researchers explained in more detail in the BKoF stage, discussing grammar and how to pronounce difficult and unfamiliar words. Several words were drilled again and again.

Observing

The research collaborators carried out the observation of students' role-play performance. Students seemed to present their best. They performed role-play in pairs. The researchers gave scoring and grading of students' achievement. Below the students' speaking achievement tests in every cycle.

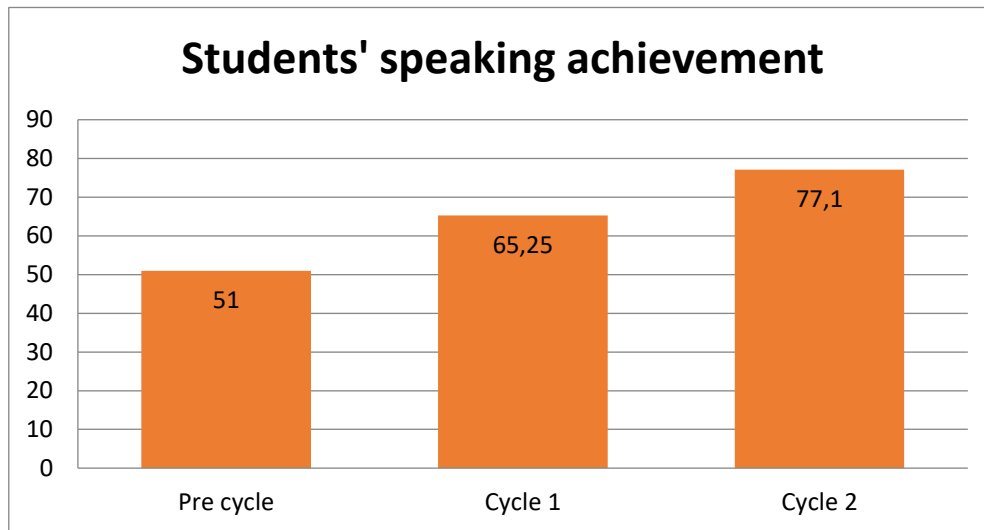## Students' speaking achievement

Figure 3. The results of speaking test

Based on the data, in the second cycle, students' performance had the indicators that the mastery of grammar was good enough. Students also spoke fluently, the various vocabularies with accurate pronunciation. The speaking achievement of cycle 2 was 77.1, above the passing grade. Besides assessing cognitive and psychomotor aspects, the collaborators assessed students' behavior in learning participation.

3. The results of observation on students' speaking activities

- Based on the observation sheet, all of the students were present (100%).

- Ten students (25%) actively asked questions.

- All of students (100%) paid attention to the researchers' explanation.

- All students (100%) were enthusiastic about joining the speaking class.

- All of students (100%) have the responsibility in group work.

- All of students (100%) were enthusiastic doing the speaking activities.

- Five students (12.5%) made noisy in the classroom.

4. The results of the researchers' activities

The assessment was not only for students, but also the researchers' treatments were assessed by all students from students' points of view. The research collaborators conducted this by interviewing students.

- The researchers were excellent in conducting students' achievement motivation.

- The researchers were good at organizing class management.

- The researchers were good at providing the tasks.

- The researchers were good at supporting group work.

- The researchers were good at giving feedback to the students' questions.

- The researchers were good at assessing students' achievement.

- The researchers were good at giving an evaluation.

- The researchers were good at encouraging students' presentations.

Discussion

Speaking is the most special language skill. Because everybody usually asks, '*Do you speak English?' or 'Can you speak English?'* instead of *'Do you read English?', 'Do you listen English?', Do you write English?'.* Conversational English has to be taught, and teachers should have the ability to think creatively and think of new methods. A wide variety of strategies may be used to pique students' interest in both learning and practice. Motivating and encouraging students to speak in front of others should be a priority for teachers.

One of the primary challenges in instructing English to students of other languages is getting them to the point where they can communicate effectively in the target language. However, most English learners are usually afraid to speak English. Their reasons are various such as lack of grammar competence, vocabulary, and poor pronunciation. Teachers should apply language learning strategies and learning media. The role-play was chosen as a learning strategy. It brings real-life situations into the classroom. Students can choose a character in the role based on the topic. This is supported by some studies conducted by (Ahmada & Munawaroh, 2022; Hamsia, 2018; Leong et al., 2017). Teachers should combine learning strategy and learning media in the teaching-learning process. In this study, the use of the English conversation practice application significantly helps students' linguistic competence.

Engaging in learning digital media makes students enjoy themselves and be joyful. There is no denying that the internet has changed education dramatically over the past 20 years. It brings primary sources to every classroom and, among other things, enables more and faster communication between teachers and students. With digital acceleration, the education system in this country is changing. However, the challenge is how quickly students and teachers adapt to teaching, learning, and assessment methods. Both students and teachers can use this fast-changing digital gift consistently and wisely. This is supported by (Almarshadi et al., 2019; Baron, 2020; Chotimah & Pratiwi, 2022).

Conclusion

The effectiveness of language instruction is also contingent on the teachers. It is the responsibility of teachers to inspire and motivate students to develop the self-confidence necessary to regularly engage in speaking activities. Because of this, teachers in EFL classrooms take on a variety of responsibilities. One of the most essential responsibilities that fall under this category is the establishment of situations that facilitate verbal communication. Students who utilize digital media and programs developed for English conversation practice are more likely to enjoy improving their speaking abilities. This is especially true of oral communication skills. They are capable of acting out a role play consisting of a brief discussion with self-assurance. It is strongly suggested that users make use of this digital tool to improve their public speaking skills.

Acknowledgment

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