SCAFFOLDING AS A TOOL IN IMPROVING STUDENTS'
CONTENT-WISE ORAL PERFORMANCE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare the work in this project paper is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRAK

Projek ini adalah mengenai penggunaan 'scaffolding' sebagai satu cara untuk meningkatkan persembahan lisan pelajar dari segi isi penyampaian. Ia bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti keberkesanan teknik 'scaffolding' di dalam membantu pelajar dari segi isi penyampaian di dalam persembahan lisan. Oleh kerana projek ini menggunakan teknik eksperimental, terdapat perbandingan di antara kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan di dalam penyampaian lisan. Di samping itu, perbandingan di antara penyampaian pelajar lelaki dan perempuan di dalam ke dua-dua kumpulan juga dilakukan. Sampel terdiri daripada 40 pelajar tingkatan 6 Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sungkai, Sungkai. Kumpulan eksperimental mengandungi 21 sampel iaitu 6 lelaki dan 15 perempuan, sementara kumpulan kawalan mempunyai 19 sampel dengan 4 lelaki dan 15 perempuan. Sampel projek melalui ujian pra, 2 minggu sesi lisan and ujian pasca. Semasa sesi lisan dijalankan, sampel di dalam kumpulan eksperimental akan menggunakan projek yang disediakan sementara kumpulan kawalan menggunakan teknik pengajaran yang digunakan oleh guru mereka. Skor yang diperolehi di dalam ujian pra dan pasca di analisa menggunakan program SPSS di mana hasilnya dihuraikan dan di bincangkan. Hasil kajian mendapati kedua-dua kumpulan menunjukkan peningkatan didalam isi penyampaian lisan mereka. Ini bermakna kedua-dua teknik yang digunakan dapat membantu pelajar. Bagi sampel lelaki dan perempuan, didapati sampel lelaki memberikan persembahan yang lebih baik berbanding sampel perempuan. Projek ini boleh menjadi garis panduan untuk guru di dalam mengajar kemahiran lisan. Bagi para pelajar ia boleh menjadi satu pendekatan yang menarik di dalam pembelajaran kemahiran lisan mereka.

ABSTRACT

This project was concerned with the study of scaffolding as a tool of improving students' content-wise oral presentation. This study aimed to identify the effectiveness of the method scaffolding in assisting students' content-wise oral performance. Since it was an experimental study, there was a comparison between the experimental group and the control group oral performance. Besides, there was also a comparison in the males and females samples' oral performance in both groups. The participants were 40 form 6 students from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sungkai, Sungkai. The experimental group consisted of 21 students with 6 males and 15 females, while the control group had 19 students with 4 males and 15 females. The samples went through a pre-test, a 2-week speaking session and a post-test. For the speaking session, the experimental group used the project prepared and the control group followed their respective teacher's method of teaching. The scores obtained in the tests were analyzed using the SPSS program where then the results were described and discussed. At the end of the study, it was found that both groups showed an improvement in their content-wise oral performance that made both methods of teaching were effective. As for males and females performance, the males performed better than the females. This project can be a teaching guideline for teachers in teaching speaking skills. It also can be a friendly and interesting approach in learning speaking for the students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0   Introduction

This chapter mainly gives an overview of the background of the study. It includes the problem arises in acquiring speaking skills that initiates further investigation of the issue in improving students' ability in speaking. The chapter introduces the focus of the study that is scaffolding as a tool in improving students content-wise oral presentation.

1.1   Background of the Study

English language is a compulsory subject in all primary and secondary schools in line with its status as a second language in Malaysia. According to the Cabinet Committee Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Education Policy 1979, the aim of teaching English is to enable school-leavers to use English in everyday and work situations as well as to pursue higher education. In relation to the importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the use of English for ICT is included to enable the learners to access knowledge on the internet and to have network locally and overseas. A small literature component has been added to enable learners to engage in wider reading of good works for enjoyment and self development (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000).

Malaysian University English Test (MUET) came in 1999 due to the complaints saying that the Malaysian graduates are not capable to use English effectively especially lacking in the communication skills. Thus, there were many unemployed graduates even

though they have excellent result (Samuel & Zaiton, 2008). It is an initiative to prepare the students with English knowledge and ability prior to their higher education and thus produce graduates who are excellent in English language.

MUET is a test that is compulsory to all Malaysian students who wish to enter Malaysian universities at undergraduate level. It is an entry requirement that need to be fulfilled by Form 6, matriculation and college students. It is administered twice a year, in May and October. It comprises four papers: Paper 1 (Listening), Paper 2 (Speaking), Paper 3 (Reading) and Paper 4 (Writing) (Helen et al., 2008).

Based on the MUET guidelines for teachers (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2007), there are four main skills that the students need to master; listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the test, each skill has its own specified scores (Appendix 1). All the skills will be tested separately in MUET and a total score will be accumulated from each of the scores obtained. Their overall performance will be identified by bands based on the Description of Aggregated Score (Appendix 2).

Based on Helen et al. (2000), in the speaking test, there are two tasks; Task A: Individual Presentation and Task B: Group Discussion. In Task A, each student will be given a situation with a point related. They are given one minute to read and understand the situation and are allowed to ask question after the one minute. The question can be on the words, phrases and the whole content of the task. Then, they are given two minutes to prepare for their individual presentation. After the two minutes, each of the students will present orally their prepared points and elaboration.

For Task B, the students are given another two minutes to prepare for the group discussion. The discussion will be based on the same situation and the four points that each student has presented in Task A. They are to come to a conclusion on the best point to suit the situation given. It is not compulsory, but it is better to come to one decision at the end of the discussion. They are given 10 minutes for the discussion (refer Appendix 3 for an example).

For both tasks, the students are evaluated on the task fulfillment, the language and the communicative ability. In task fulfillment the focus is on the relevance of the points presented, the elaboration on the points and the examples given. For language, students

are evaluated on sentence structures, vocabulary and pronunciation used. Finally for communicative ability, the ability to take turn, to negotiate, and to be in line with the group discussion, is observed. Each part carries 18 marks which are divided into 6 bands. A maximum total of 54 marks is rounded up to 45 to reach the maximum score for speaking test (Helen et al., 2008). Therefore, speaking test contributes 45 marks of the total 300 marks. The students must make sure that they score high marks for speaking test to enable them to get excellent MUET result.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

In acquiring English language, there are four main skills that need to be mastered by all learners; listening, speaking, reading and writing (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000). However, listening and speaking are always neglected by teachers and avoided by students. According to Grugeon et al. (2005), speaking was taken for granted among the native speakers since they are able to converse in English from home. Some teachers claimed there were active speaking activities for the lower secondary. However, these activities seemed to be limited for the higher primary level because the students prefer to work individually. Students at higher primary schools are not properly taught on the speaking skills. Speaking is just short responses given towards teachers' questions or a role play of prepared texts in class. However, after the implementation of Great Britain new curriculum, the teaching of speaking skills is developing.

In Philippines, English is considered as an important language and even sometimes becomes the Filipinos' first language. However, for the past few years, there were reports in newspaper saying that the Filipinos' English proficiency is deteriorating ("Arroyo acts", 2006). Based on a research done by Kingsley Global Institute in September 2005, the Filipinos, English speaking ability is decreasing. The number of Filipinos who use English for communication went down from 56% in 1993 to 54% in 2000 and 32% in 2006 (Global Sky Inc., 2005).

Based on Woodward (2008) review on Li Yang Crazy English, he found that the English Education in China emphasized on preparing students for the examination. The teachers stress more on reading and writing since the two skills are tested in their main

examination. Listening is taught sometimes and speaking is the least taught in their teaching scheme. The students are worried of making mistakes while speaking in front of others and finally give up speaking.

Fauziah and Nita (n.d) carried out a research on teachers' perspective as to why students are not proficient in English. The findings revealed that the teachers, the syllabus that they used and the National examinations tend to focus only on main skills – writing and reading – together with grammar. Teachers were also found to be teaching for the national examinations. Not much emphasis was given to listening and speaking in both classroom teaching and national examination. This might be due to the exam-oriented system where speaking is not a component tested in the important examination. The focus is given more to reading, writing and grammar since they are the main skills tested in the national level of examinations. As a result, speaking is not specifically taught and focused until the students reach form 6 level where speaking is one of the skills tested. At this level the students have problems in their speaking ability.

In my form 6 speaking classes, I observe that students always have problems speaking in English. Most of them could not begin a speech unless they are given some time or are allowed to work in groups to prepare the text. They always say that they do not have enough ideas to give responses to the task given and to provide good and clear elaboration to support their opinion. In addition, they claim that they are afraid of making grammar mistakes and they are also not sure of the pronunciation of words. This lack of certainty and confidence cause them to avoid speaking so as not to be laughed or made fun by others friends. As a result, their oral presentation is short and not well elaborated. Quite often they provide the main ideas with little explanation to support what they say. This affects their performance in MUET speaking test because one of the item evaluated is Task Fulfillment. In this item, students are required to provide relevant ideas, elaboration and examples to the situation and task given (Helen et al., 2008).

1.3   Rationale of the Study

Many teachers claim that teaching speaking is difficult and the measurement of the skill is unclear (Grugeon et al., 2005). For the form 6 students, speaking is a skill that they

hardly practice in their English classes before (Fauziah & Nita, n.d) and as a result they do not have much confidence in doing so. However, in MUET they have to present their opinion orally and support it with elaboration and examples (Helen et al., 2008). Without a proper teaching method, the students might have problem in acquiring the speaking skills and thus affect their MUET result.

This study is carried out in the effort of identifying an effective method in teaching and learning speaking to overcome the teachers and the students' problems. The method, scaffolding, is hoped to be an interesting and supportive way to teach and learn speaking skills. The teachers can have an alternative way to teach speaking and the students may feel more confident when they work in groups and when there is someone who can assist them in completing the speaking task.

At the same time, teachers will have a chance to understand the oral performance between the male and the female students. This is very important for the teachers in preparing their teaching materials and modifying their approach towards teaching students with different abilities in speaking. Thus, teaching and learning will be more meaningful and beneficial to both teachers and students.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

There are many methods and approaches in teaching and learning speaking used by teachers and students. Some are very effective and interesting, where students are able to show their abilities and improve themselves from time to time. However, there are some which are very confusing and boring that do not motivate the students speaking initiative and finally 'kill' the students' spirit in learning speaking.

So, this study is to identify the effectiveness of the teaching method, scaffolding, in assisting the students' content-wise oral performance. Scaffolding encourages group work and assistance among the teachers and the students. At the same time, it is to see the difference in the oral performance between the male and female students. It is always assumed that the females usually perform better than the boys in language wise.

1.5   Research Questions

This study is based on two research questions;

1. Is there a difference in the oral performance between the samples in the experimental and the control groups?

2. Is there a difference in oral performance between the females and the males in both experimental and control groups?

1.6   Hypotheses

There are two hypotheses to be proven in this study.

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant difference between the marks obtained by the students in the experimental group as compared to the control group in their content-wise oral presentation.

Hypothesis 2

There is a significant difference between the marks scored by the females as compared to the males in both groups in their content-wise oral presentation.

1.7   Significance of the Study

This study is significant to both teachers and learners. To the teachers, the finding of the study can be a good guide in understanding the nature of the students' learning process. Each student has different ability and style in learning that need to be acknowledged by teachers (Slavin, 1991). In addition, teachers will get to know a strategy in teaching speaking, a skill that is considered as difficult to be taught. Teachers can vary their teaching styles and be more confident in teaching speaking to students.

For the students, they will have a different view towards learning speaking skills and a new approach in speaking confidently. They will have more positive motivation to speak English and thus increase their interests towards learning speaking. It is hoped that speaking is no longer a hindrance in acquiring English ability among students.

1.8   Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research, a specific definition is given to the important terms. It is to give a better view on the focus of the research.

1.8.1   Speaking Skills

Speaking skills have a wide range of definition. It is a way of communication that involves transmitting message, sounds, language used and communicative strategies (Helen et al., 2008). For the purpose of this study, speaking skill is focused on the students' ability to give relevant opinion, elaboration and examples based on the task given.

1.8.2   Scaffolding

Scaffolding in this study is referred as a method used in which the teacher provides assistance to the students and the group members help each other in understanding the task and subsequently, present the result of their discussion. The teacher and their peers will assist throughout the learning process in terms of ideas, elaboration and examples.

1.9   Summary

The issue discussed in this chapter describes the initial points that contributed to the idea of this research. It covers the problems occur in learning speaking skills, the rationale, the purpose and the significance of the study and the terms used. The following chapter deals with the literature review related to the focus of the study scaffolding and content-wise oral presentation. Chapter 2 reviews current research in this particular area