
IMPROVING INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY THROUGH TOPIC-BASED PAIRED CONVERSATION ACTIVITY

Rahmatullah Syaripuddin

STAI DDI Pinrang

rahmatullah.syaripuddin@gmail.com

Abstract

This research was based on the students' problem regarding the English teaching of speaking skill. The objective of the research was to find out whether or not the implementation of topic-based paired conversation activity improves the EFL (English Foreign Language) students' speaking ability at senior high school 3 Parepare, Indonesia. The researcher applied a quasi-experimental design, with two groups - experimental and control class. The population of the research was the eleventh-grade students at senior high school 3 Parepare. The sample of the research was taken by using total random sampling consisting of 56 students from two classes taken from the population of the eleventh-grade students. The result of the data analysis showed that the students' speaking ability improved, as evidenced by the result of probability and significant value in the post-test, where the probability value was 0.00 and the significance value was 0.05. In conclusion, teaching speaking through topic-based paired conversation activity was effective to improve the Indonesian EFL students' speaking ability.

Keywords: Teaching Speaking, Speaking Ability, Topic-based paired Conversation Activity

I. Introduction

English is used almost worldwide. It plays an important role in constructing the global aspects such as technology, business, agriculture, economics, science, research, social interaction, application, etc. It shows that English is not only used to communicate but also to compete globally. In the scientific aspect, English is one of the subjects applied in the education system as a whole, for instance, is in senior high school which it had been studied as a compulsory subject. On the other hand, it is also implemented as the local content especially in elementary school. English is a compulsory subject from junior high school up to senior high school because the government had been putting it on the national curriculum to make students study about it. On the national curriculum of Indonesia 2016, English has four skills to be studied; those are reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Moreover, there are also four aspects of it; those are vocabulary, pronunciation, structure, and grammar. One of the most important skills is speaking. Speaking is a tool to communicate and interact with people. It uses to express ideas and

arguments. Without speaking, people will be difficult to communicate and interact with others, because, in the globalization era, people only communicate by using verbal communication. One of the ways to achieve that is having good speaking.

Speaking is a skill that everyone can improve through practice. This practice can be started by singing a song, responding when someone asks for something, describing things in the environment, etc. In such a manner, speaking is not an easy skill to be master. It was proved by seeing the speaking ability of students in Indonesia, for example: in the pre-test at the eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Parepare, the researcher discovered students' speaking ability was low. Their mean score was 27 and it was collected through interviews. This score was categorized as a low achievement based on the achievement classification of *Dirjen Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah 2014* where the predicate standard of the good score is B- and if it is converted to 100 scales, it becomes 62. It is categorized good score.

The students' speaking ability was low because of the teaching activity. This data was obtained by giving the questionnaire to the students. The result discovered that 63 % of students stated that they were unsatisfied with the teaching activity in their classroom. In order to solve it, there is one teaching activity that can be used to improve the speaking ability of the students in senior high school, namely topic-based paired conversation activity. This activity is an easy way to improve students' speaking ability, for it is using topic talk. By giving the topic, the students will be easy to argue their ideas. Topic-based paired conversation activity had been successfully improving the confidence in speaking English for EFL students in Japan. It was researched by DeSteffen (2015). In his activity, he used Topic Talk (TT) activity as the main tool to improve the confidence of Japanese students' in speaking English.

II. Review of Related Literature

The Importance of Speaking

Speaking is one of the skills that can be improved through practice. According to Akhyak & Indramawan (2013), speaking is the primary ability to develop. In line with it, Amoozesh & Gorjian (2015) also stated that speaking is an important skill in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and it has been claimed to be at the core of language learning (Kosar & Bedir, 2014). As mentioned by Ghaffari & Fatemi (2015), speaking is one of the four main skills needed for actual communication in any language. They also added that English is commonly used as a way of communication, especially in the internet domain, it should be advanced along with the other capabilities so that these unified skills will augment communication accomplishment both with native speakers of English and other associates of the global community.

Having good English speaking is essential especially for the students because it becomes the bridge for them to know the world. So improving the English-speaking competence is very important for the Indonesian students where we know Speaking is extremely needed to give a big contribution to students to perform their communication skills better (Akhyak & Indramawan, 2013). Additionally, Tom et.al (2013) stated that Speaking in English can be a challenging task to English language learners, especially if they do not have a good command of the language. It has played an important role in a foreign language setting. It was considered to be an undervalued skill. Perhaps this is due to the opinion that the main indicator of success in learning a language is the ability to speak that language (Tahir, 2015). Therefore, English is the language of global terms that need to be developed in Indonesia. Due to the ability to speak English, many people have been able to get and provide information that is very important to develop oneself and the environment (Siburian, 2013).

Activities in Teaching Speaking

There are some activities in teaching speaking explained by several researchers (Kayi, 2006; Efrizal, 2012; Oradee, 2012; Fitriani et.al, 2013; Javid, 2013; Effendi, 2015; Somjay & Jansen, 2015). The teaching activities are as follows:

Discussion

The Discussion aimed to take a conclusion, share ideas about information that we have, find solutions in their discussion group. Therefore, this activity help the students to build their critical thinking and decision making. Thus, they learn how to express their ideas in polite ways. Kayi (2006) stated that this activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision-making, and students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with others. Discussion is one of communicative teaching. According to Efrizal (2012), CLT aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and to develop techniques and procedures for teaching language skills that are based on interdependent aspects of language and communication. In line with it, Oradee (2012) stated that in conducting a communicative activity, the context should be focused on meaning, not the form.

Simulation

Fitriani et.al (2013) stated that simulation does not only make the students active but also creative and critical. They also added that simulations simulate real-life situations and realistic environments. Simulation refers to the act of imitating the behavior of some situations or some process through something suitably analogous (Javid, 2013).

Interviews

Interviews can be conducted by giving the topic to the students or to suppose the students to select the given topic. In this activity, however, the teacher must provide a rubric to the students so that teachers can find out which question they can ask or what path to follow, yet students should also prepare their interview questions. After conducting this interview, each student can present his or her study in the class. Kayi (2006) states that conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them to become socialized people.

Reporting

Reporting is an activity that obligates the students to know about the information. It is almost similar to the debate technique in terms of the implementation where its implementation encourages students to be actively speaking in front of the classroom after looking for the information. Therefore, the debate technique has several advantages as well as reporting activity. The advantages of the debate technique are educating the students about responsibility, students are motivated and enjoying the activity, improving speaking ability and it is a form of produced conversation (Somjay & Jansen, 2015).

The Concept of Topic-Based Paired Conversation Activity

DeSteffen (2015) argued that topic-based paired conversation activity is the activity that developed Topic Talk (TT) intervention activity on the confidence of students to utilize English orally. He explained the steps to implement topic-based paired conversation activity: (1) students assign a random partner and are instructed to converse for a period of one to three minutes regarding the assigned topic for the week; (2) during each lesson, students form three unique pairs and with each successive conversation, students are expected to speak for a slightly longer period. The first conversation is limited to one minute, the second pairing is two minutes, and in the final rotation, students are instructed to speak for three minutes; (3) Participants are provided with a Question-Answer-Comment (QAC) organizer designed to assist students in brainstorming various questions and comments in preparation for weekly intervention. The organizer consists of three columns. The first column contains stems of questions that students had previously studied. The second column contains the stem of an appropriate response to the related question. The final column of the organizer is for students to insert a potential comment or conversation rejoinder to express in a conversation if the

related question is utilized by their partner; (4) After being informed of the conversation topic, students are instructed to complete the questions and answers using their information.

Achmad & Yusuf (2014) explained that pair-work is more efficient than a group or whole-class discussion as every student gets the opportunity to speak, especially for introverted students who are irresolute to talk in front of the whole class or teachers. In addition, the face-to-face interaction between two students results in a more audible conversation which motivates activity involvement. This may occur consciously or unconsciously where students correct each other's mistakes and help each other with the vocabulary needed. Besides, Amoozesh & Gorjian (2015) argue that developing good conversation skills often requires that students break bad habits and come up with conversation topics. Although some students can improve their communicative abilities in their way (finding chances to talk to English speakers or watching English films or TV programs), seeking effective ways to organize students for spontaneous communication is one of the biggest challenges for all existing language teaching methodologies. They also stated that class instruction is important to provide students with conversational strategies to help them avoid or overcome communication breakdowns.

III. Research Method

The strategy applied in this research was the quasi-experimental method, with a non-equivalent control group design. The researcher used two classes as the sample, namely the experimental class and the control class. The population of this research was the eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Parepare. There were two classes of IPA, namely IPA 1 and IPA 2: consisting of 31 students each. So the total population was 62 students. The sample was taken by using the total sampling technique. First, the researcher wrote down the name of classes XI IPA 1 and XI IPA 2 on papers to determine which class would be the sample. Then the sample that would be taken was class XI IPA 2 as the experimental group and class XI IPA 1 as a control group.

To find out the improvement of teaching speaking through topic-based paired conversation activity, the researcher gave interview tests to the students. In the interview test, the researcher gave several topics to be chosen by the students, and then the researcher gave 1 to 3 minutes to be explained by the students. The test applied was pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was used to find out the students' speaking ability before giving treatment, and a post-test was used to find out the students' speaking ability after giving treatment.

Firstly the researcher interviewed the students by giving a topic. Then, the researcher explained what the students were going to do and interview them one by one related to the given topic and the last was the researcher checked the students' work and gave the score. After giving the treatment, the researcher gave a post-test, this was the last meeting. The researcher gave a post-test to measure the students' speaking ability taught through topic-based paired conversation activity and report activity. The post-test consisted of four interview questions. In the treatment, the researcher taught speaking through topic-based paired conversation activity as the pre-speaking activity for the experimental group in helping the students to enhance their idea. On the other side, for the control group the researcher gave speaking material by using report activity. It was held four times to find out the student's speaking ability.

IV. Findings and Discussion

The findings were obtained through a speaking test at the eleventh-grade students of SMA

Negeri 3 Parepare. The researcher applied all of the procedures that had been shown in the last chapter, as has been explained previously in collecting data, the researcher conducted two terms of tests, namely pre-test and post-test in experimental class and control class by using SPSS version 21. It aims to find out the significant difference of the student from both classes, the researcher collected the data from the tests which have been given to the students after analyzing the data, the researcher found the students' score and it was tabulated in the table.

Table 1: The mean score and Standard Deviation of the Students in Pre-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	26	31.19	15.16
Control	30	23.51	10.49

Table 1 shows that the mean score obtained by the students before giving the treatment in both experimental class and control class is significantly different. The mean score of the experimental class was higher and the mean score of the control class. The mean score for both experimental and control classes was classified into poor classification. It means that the mean score of the pre-test obtained by the two classes was significantly different before giving treatment. The standard deviation of the experimental class before giving treatment was higher than the standard deviation of the experimental class. It means that the students' ability of experimental class in understanding the material was more varied than students' ability of control class.

Table 2: The mean score and Standard Deviation of the Students in Post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	26	59.82	16.50
Control	30	42.03	18.94

Table 2 shows that the mean score obtained by the students after giving the treatment in both experimental class and control class is significantly different. The mean score of the experimental class was higher and the mean score of the control class. The mean score for both experimental and control classes was classified into fair classification. It means that the mean score of the pre-test obtained by the two classes was significantly different before giving treatment. The standard deviation of the experimental class after giving treatment was lower than the standard deviation of the control class. It means that the students' ability to control class in understanding the material was more varied than students' ability of the experimental class. Besides, the standard deviation of both experimental and control classes was improved after giving treatment. It means that the activity used in the treatment process made the students' ability of experimental class and control class in understanding the material was more varied.

Table 3: The gain score in pre-test and post-test

Sample	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain Score
Experimental	31.19	59.82	28.63
Control	23.51	42.03	18.52

Table 3 shows that the gain score of the experimental class is higher than the gain score of the control class. It means that the gain scores of the pre-test and post-test by the two classes were different. It shows that the gain score of the experimental class is slightly higher than the gain score of the control class.

In testing the hypothesis, the researcher applied a t-test formula at the level of significance with $\alpha = 0.05$. The result of the calculation (SPSS 21.0) is shown as follows:

Table 4: The t-test result of the students' pre-test in experimental class and control class to improve the students' speaking ability.

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
Pre test	Equal variances assumed	7,065	,010	2,22	54	,030	7,6778	3,44716	,76674 14,589
	Equal variances not assumed			2,17	43,58	,035	7,6778	3,53675	,54810 14,807

Table 4 shows that the probability value (0.03) is lower than the significance value (α)=(0.05). The analysis shows that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. It means that the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare for experimental class and control class before giving treatment is significantly different. It means that the speaking ability of the experimental class and control class has different abilities.

Table 5: The t-test result of the students' post-test in experimental class and control class to improve the students' speaking ability.

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post test	Equal variances assumed	2,106	,152	3,718	54	,000	17,792	4,7851	8,1986	27,385
	Equal variances not assumed			3,756	53,99	,000	17,792	4,7375	8,2939	27,290

Table 5 shows that the probability value (0.00) is lower than the significance value (α)=(0.05). The analysis shows that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. It means that the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare for experimental class and control class is significantly different.

Table 6: Gain score of Pre-test and Post-test for Both Experimental and Control Class

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Gain score	Equal variances assumed	,284	,596	2,01	54	,049	10,114	5,0116	,06652	20,1621
	Equal variances not assumed			2,00	51,70	,050	10,114	5,0355	,00829	20,2203

Table 6 shows that the probability value (0.049) is lower than the significance value (α)=(0.05). The analysis shows that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative

hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. It means that the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare for experimental class and control class after giving treatment is significantly different. It means that teaching speaking through topic-based-paired conversation activity was significantly improving the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare.

Before conducting pre-test and post-test, the researcher found some facts when doing observation in SMA Negeri 3 Parepare, the facts explained some reasons why the researcher conducted this research in it with the aims to increase the students' speaking ability. First of all, the researcher conducted the interview when doing observation. Observation is important for data collection through direct visual or auditory experience of behavior. It focuses on hypothesis testing and knowledge accumulation, whereas in practice it is a tool for change or amelioration of undesirable conditions (Monette, et.al 2011). During the observation, the researcher found that most of the students got bored with their teaching activity because the learning activity used by the teacher was not motivating and the teacher sometimes did not handle their classroom to teach English. Varying the teaching activity is very important in teaching English because the students' learning differences in the classroom are easy to be accommodated (Orlich, et.al, 2010).

The result of observation showed that the students' speaking ability was still low. It was proven by the interview result of the speaking test. In experimental in which interview is the one that takes place between one interviewer and one interviewee (Etchegoyen, 2005). The mean score of the students' speaking ability was 27 and it was categorized as a low achievement based on the assessment of *Dirjen Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah 2014* where the predicate standard of the good score is B- or 62. Consequently, the researcher implements topic-based paired conversation activity to improve the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability.

Before giving treatment, the researcher conducted a pre-test for both experimental and control classes to know the students' prior knowledge in English speaking. Pre-test and post purpose for comparing groups and/or measuring change resulting from experimental treatments (Dimitrov & Jr, 2003). The pre-test result showed that the students' achievement frequencies and their percentage in the pre-test were still poor and most of them got poor classification scores. After conducting the pre-test, the researcher gave four times of treatments in both the experimental class and control class. The given materials were the same for both classes. The materials given in each meeting were smoking in a public place, corruption in Indonesia, the increasing price of BBM, and the ASEAN economic community. In the experimental class, firstly, the students were designed to sit with their partners (pair). After having their partner, the researcher gave a topic to the students to be discussed in pairs and watched them a video related to the given topic. The video aims to give a guideline of the topic that would be discussed by every pair of students. Besides, giving a video in conversation could generally lead to improving the students' speaking ability (Amoozesh & Gorjian, 20150).

Secondly, the researcher gave a paper containing a table. The table was used to write the question of brainstorming and information related to the given topic. It was also functioned to write the different information of students that were found from their partner. Brainstorming is a way to help the students to speak effectively, quickly, and freely. The benefit of it is that the students are not criticized other students' ideas so that it helped the students to share their new ideas freely (Kayi, 2006). In the learning process, the use of brainstorming was very effective in giving understanding to the students. Most of the students' problems were because they did not have enough ideas to deliver. On the other hand, by using brainstorming in this research, students easily argue their ideas by noticing the question of brainstorming. Moreover, the table of brainstorming also helped the students to develop their ideas by combining them with new information from their partners.

New information from the partner was got from different information. To get the new

information, the students should be able to identify the new information explained by their partners. The activity is similar to the information gap activity and finds the difference activity, in which the information gap activity involves the students to be working in pairs. It is a very effective activity because every student has a chance to speak (Kayi, 2006). The students shared the information that they got and his/her partner wrote it down on the table as new information. This also aims to involve the students to focus on the communication process, in which the students gave more attention to their partner's explanation. On the other hand, finding the difference activity is an activity to find the difference of things whether it is a picture or information (Kayi, 2006). Finding the difference in this research was used in the conversation of experimental class, in which the students analyzed the information they heard from his/her partner. They analyzed what was different information of his/her partner and they wrote it down on the table of brainstorming.

After completing the table, the researcher instructed the students to do a discussion with their partners. The Discussion aims to make communicative competence, share ideas about information that we have, find solutions in their discussion group, and involve students in an activity (Efrizal, 2012; Oradee, 2012). Therefore, this activity helps the students to build their critical thinking and decision making (Kayi, 2006). Thus, They learn how to express their ideas in polite ways. The discussion activity was used in this research was successful in activating the students in doing conversation, because before they did the conversation, they discussed the topic given by the researcher.

In the control class, however, the materials given by the researcher were the same. The difference was only at the activity. The activity used in the control class is report activity. Reporting is an activity that the researcher used in the control class, this activity involves the students looking for the information and they will report it in front of the classroom based on the received information (Kayi, 2006). It was also successful in activating the students to deliver their ideas. By implementing this activity students were motivated, enjoyed, and active in looking for the information based on the given topic (Somjay & Jansen, 2015). It was also successful in improving their speaking ability if it was compared with students' speaking ability before giving treatment. After giving the treatment to the students, the researcher conducted a post-test. In post-test, the researcher interviewed the students as well as in pre-test. The interview aims to give the students chance to practice their ability either in the classroom or outside the classroom (Kayi, 2006). It can be conducted by giving the topic to the students or to suppose the students to select the given topic. In this activity, however, the researcher must provide some questions to the students so that the researcher was able to find out which question they can ask or what path to follow, yet students should also prepare their interview questions. This interview was used in conducting the pre-test and post-test to know students' speaking ability. It was conducted by making some questions regarding the topic. Therefore, by interviewing the students, they were easy to argue their ideas.

The result of the post-test showed that the percentage score and frequencies of students' achievement increased in both experimental and control classes because many students got good classification. But, the classifications were different, in the experimental class, many of the students were in good classification, while in the control class most of the students were still in poor classification. it means that teaching English speaking to the students through topic-based paired conversation activity is significantly different than teaching speaking teaching speaking through report activity.

Table 1 discussed the mean score and standard deviation of the students' pre-test both in experimental class and control class, the table indicated that the mean score of the students' pre-test in experimental class was low (31.19) and it was higher than the mean score of the students in

control class (23.51). While the standard deviation in the pre-test of the experimental class was higher (15.16) than in the control (10.49). It revealed that the speaking ability of the students both in experimental class and control class has different comprehension before giving treatment. Comprehension occurs when the elements that join in the process achieve a stable state in which the majority of elements are meaningfully related to one another and other elements that do not fit the pattern of majority are suppressed (Kintsch, 2003). As a consideration, the table 2 the researcher put the result of the mean score and standard deviation of the students' post-test both in experimental class and control class. In the description of table 2, it indicated that the mean score of students' post-test in the experimental class was higher (59.82) than the mean score of the students' post-test in the control class (42.03). The standard deviation in the post-test of the experimental class was lower (16.50) than the standard deviation in the post-test of the control class (18.94). It revealed that the mean score and standard deviation of the students' post-test were different. It means that teaching speaking through topic-based paired conversation activity was better than teaching speaking through report activity.

Table 4 shows that the probability value of the students' pre-test in the experimental class and control class was lower (0.030) than the significance value (α) = 0.05, which shows that the probability value was lower than the significance value. The analysis shows that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. It indicates that there is a significant difference between the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability before giving treatment. In table 5 shows that the probability value of the students' pre-test in the experimental class and control class was lower (0.00) than the significance value (α) = 0.05, it was shown that the probability value was lower than the significance value. The analysis shows that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. It indicates that there is a significant difference between the eleventh-grade students' speaking abilities after being given treatment. To analyze the data deeply, the researcher compared each students' gain score for both experimental class and control class in table 6 to know what hypotheses were going on.

Table 6 shows that the probability value of the students' gain score in the experimental class and control class was lower (0.049) than the significance value (α) = 0.05, it was shown that the probability value was lower than the significance value. The analysis shows that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. It indicates that there is a significant difference between the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability who were taught through topic-based paired conversation activity that the students who were taught through report activity at the eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Parepare.

V. Conclusion

Based on the finding and the discussion presented in the previous chapter, the researcher concluded that "teaching speaking through topic based-paired conversation activity improved the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare". After seeing the result from pre-test and post-test found through findings of the research shows that the result of the post-test was higher than the pre-test. Besides, after calculating the t-test score, it shows that there was a significant difference between the two classes after giving treatment. It means that teaching speaking through topic-based paired conversation activity significantly improved the eleventh-grade students' speaking ability at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare.

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