FOSTERING A NATURAL ATMOSPHERE IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION SKILL IN A BUSINESS MEETING

[1]Lia Agustina and [1]R. Setiawan

[1]English Lecturer, Accounting Department, State Polytechnic of Malang
Corresponding Author Email: rsetiawan@polinema.ac.id

Article Info	Abstract
	Engaging a fun class creates a positive classroom atmosphere. Research has indicated that if a positive classroom atmosphere is created, students will have better learning and engage more, which means it is one of the most effective and powerful tools teachers can use to encourage students learning. Oral communication skill is essential for thinking and learning. By getting the knowledge of it, students would be able to express information, opinions, understand concepts, and would be able to discuss experience and expertise. The researcher used an Action Research Method. The purpose was to see the improvement of the students' ability to speak up. The subject was 32 students of Accountant Department – State Polytechnic of Malang. The result of the study showed that most students showed an improvement in all four language skills, but speaking skills had the most significant increase.

INTRODUCTION

Creating a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere naturally should be considered (Francis et al., 2018; Vercellotti, 2017). Some research has indicated that if a positive classroom atmosphere is created, students learn better and engage more (Haerazi et al., 2019; Rachmawati, 2019). Bringing a natural atmosphere and engaging students on the assignments would mean that it is one of the most effective and powerful tools teachers can use to encourage students' learning (Gonzales-Betancor et al., 2019). There are some factors that are related to a positive classroom atmosphere; one of the important factors is how teachers respond to students' behaviour. Teachers' responses to students' behaviour will help to set the atmosphere of the class.

The ability of the students to learn English may vary in the classroom. It is caused by the background knowledge and the environment, which are not the same. It would be wise if teachers are being friendlier to the ones who ask questions or have difficulties in learning English and help them to solve their problems. Conducting a positive classroom atmosphere by setting it naturally would influence students' motivation to learn and to cover the students' problems in English.

Sometimes motivating EFL students to speak up is not an easy job for a teacher. Even though there is an opportunity, but some students choose to remain silent. In contrast, in fact, students only have a little exposure to the target language to practice their language outside the classroom. One of the considerations to help students to be brave to speak up English is by proposing a natural atmosphere in the classroom. Teaching business English would be good when using the materials which will help the students to get ready with real-life situations in the workplace, and it relates to authenticity. "Authentic material is any kind of material taken

from the real world and not specifically created for the purpose of language teaching" (Ellis, 2000).

The meaning of collaborative is a group work that generally involves a small number of students working together to achieve a task. This technique has been researched extensively for thirty years or more, as shown by Slavin (1995) in his well-known book; Slavin has listed more than 90 experimental researches about collaborative learning. Slavin concluded that the reason for collaborative learning succeeds as an educational methodology is the use of convergent tasks; group goals based on the individual responsibility of all group members lead to increased learning achievement, regardless of subject or proficiency level of students involved. According to Jacobs, Power, and Loh, (2002), there are eight basic principles of collaborative learning in the classroom. Those include cooperation as a value, heterogeneous grouping, positive interdependence, individual accountability, simultaneous interaction, equal participation, collaborative skills, and group autonomy. Collaborative learning also increases learner motivation and promotes harmonious group dynamics, lowering classroom anxiety, and facilitating interaction in the classroom as well as an individual sense of self-competence and self-worth (Ushioda, 2006).

Perform a business meeting a teacher may introduce integrated skills since the skills lead to optimal English as a second language to be used as a means of communication and interactions. The English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning process would involve the four primary skills, i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This process also includes associated or related skills, such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage.

According to Rebecca, 2001, the integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. Integrating language skills also promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). The main objective of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is on how students should be able to communicate effectively by using the language, which may help the students to develop certain skills and abilities that would be demanded by their target goals. Doing oral presentations plays a significant role in engaging the students in the process of foreign language learning cognitively.

Based on all the reasons above, this study was directed to see the effective feedback obtained from fostering a natural atmosphere in implementing a business meeting project that would motivate students to improve their oral communication skills. Theoretically, the result of the study could enrich teachers' knowledge of teaching English, and the study positively impact on the observer- professional practices and effect on increasing students' performance

RESEARCH METHOD

Lewin (in Kemmis and Taggart 1992:8) describes action research proceeds with a spiral of steps. The steps consist of planning, action, and evaluation of the result of the action. Kemmis and Taggart (1992:11) define planning as constructed action and, by definition, must be prospective to action, which must be forward-looking. It must be recognized that all social actions were, to some degree, unpredictable and, therefore, somewhat risky. The general plan must be flexible enough to adapt to unforeseen effects and previously unrecognized constraints. While the action is deliberate and controlled, it is a careful and thoughtful variation of practice and is critically informed. Furthermore, they mention that observation has the function of documenting the effects of critically informed action, while reflection recalls action has been recorded in observation, but it was also active. The last step in a circle is the reflection. Reflection seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues, and

constraints made to be manifested in strategic action. Action research is a dynamic process in which these four moments are to be understood as moments in the action research spiral of planning, action, observing and reflecting.
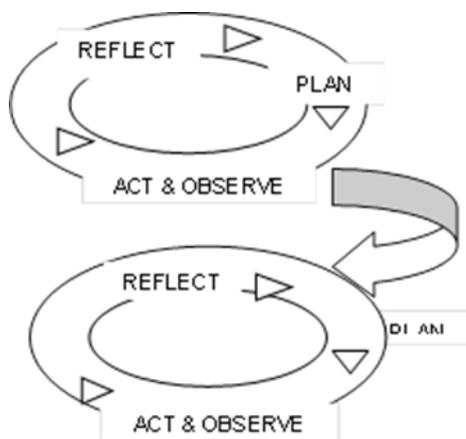

Figure 1. Action Research Spiral (Kemmis & Taggart, 1992)

Thirty-two students of the second-year students of the fourth semester of the Accountancy Department-State Polytechnic of Malang 2017/2018 were the subjects of the study. The students have four hours (4 x 45 minutes) per week in the fourth semester. The location of conducting the research was at the English Laboratory at the Accounting Department-State Polytechnic of Malang.

In order to be easier to monitor the implementation of the teaching and learning process in the classroom, some instruments were prepared. The first instrument was a pre-test. It was used to inspect, to observe, to record, and to judge the ability of the students. The second instrument was a project planning form or students' activities' sheets. It was used to record the students-activities during the process of doing the project. The third instrument was a weekly goal sheet; it was used to record the data weekly for the teacher. It contained written descriptions of what the observer heard, saw, experienced, and thought when collecting the data during the teaching and learning process in the classroom. These were intended to anticipate the possibility of losing the relevant data during the implementation of the action. The fourth instruments were observation checklist 1 and checklist 2, which were used to record the data for the students' improvement. The last instrument was a questionnaire, which was used to see the students' opinions about the model implemented.

In the classroom management in performing a business meeting project in the researcher classroom, the teachers implemented a strategy for the whole course. They then concentrated on the individual lessons with the typical structure of the warm-up, core activities, and wrap-up. Business English classroom management combines with basic English Language Teaching management such as class size and structures. It can be seen in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1
Learning Activities

No	Activities	Meetings
1	Searching for the materials – project 1 and Consultation	1
2	Comprehending, summarizing and synthesize and Consultation	2-3
3	Creating PowerPoint, dialogue and Consultation	4
4	Doing practice	5
5	Performing the Business Meeting – group 1&2	6
6	Performing the Business Meeting – group 3&4	7

note	*Consultation was done in and outside the classroom*

The classroom management done by the teachers in the class includes the students are involved in setting the chairs and the tables originally as an authentic-meeting room. Students are asked to wear authentic costumes, such as an officer's uniform. They are asked to present their tasks using PowerPoint, and the presentation is done in the form of discussion. Students are asked to pretend to disagree on some points of the discussion to create a dynamic and lively presentation. Creativity, either in the concept, PowerPoint, and setting the room, is claimed. Active, responsible, creative, diligent, independent students are also claimed by the researcher. The natural presentation as a real meeting outside the room is really expected (students have to do the practice a lot to look like a real presentation). In the teaching-learning process, the researcher places herself as a facilitator and a consultant. The teaching method is carried out in the form of a discussion and a consultation. Also, the explanation of the projects is only given in the introduction. In the rest of the meetings, the teacher do in the form of the consultations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of doing the research was aimed to implement a strategy of fostering a natural atmosphere by doing business meeting presentations; it was used to improve the students' communicative competence. The obtained results from the students' questionnaire and teachers' interview revealed that fostering the natural atmosphere in implementing business meeting projects were the ideal way through which English Foreign Language students could improve their communicative competence.

A teacher's role involves more than just standing in front of a classroom and teaching. Benedik (2005:23) describes them as "…assessor, organizer, prompter, participant and as a source." At the same time, Richards et al. (1986) stressed more the roles of needs' analyst, counselor, and group manager. A successful teacher brings a real and natural atmosphere in order to make the students enjoy the sessions. In this vein, Dobson (1992:69) advocated that "Realia is not only good for stimulating conversation skills; it tends to make the session especially inexorable." It should be, the teachers have to encourage the students to practice their oral English and speak spontaneously by involving them in communicative tasks.

Below was the situation facing during the implementation of the study; The projects were implemented for one semester of 16 meetings with two meetings for doing the pre-test and post-test, 14 meetings for assigning the business meeting project (7 meetings – 1st project, the rest of the seven meetings for 2nd project).

The result of the pre-test showed that the students' ability was in the level of very unsatisfactory either on reading skill, writing skill, or on oral report skill. The students got problems comprehending texts and on delivering spoken language. One of the source problems of the students was their limited vocabulary.

The model that is implemented in the class is to foster the natural atmosphere in the business meeting projects in the classroom. It would give benefits to the students to invest more knowledge on content, improve communicative competence with the different components that contain; all language systems areas (vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and phonology) and skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening) and even effected on build students' confidence that demanded the students reach the target goal.

During the implementation of the model, the students found difficulties in comprehending the authentic materials but the teacher-researcher forcing the students to use them because in the researcher's mind authentic materials were considered to be important and needed to be continued on finishing the project since authentic materials helped the students to improve their reading skills as well as to introduce them to content. The researcher

suggested the solution by asking the students to find the simplest articles that related to the content proposed.

Fortunately, in the second project, the students' difficulty in reading the authentic materials was decreased. The researcher realized it when the students were having the consultation of their second project. It seemed the students had started to adapt and to find a strategy to get the article's proposed and to comprehend the articles, which means that the students' skill in reading was improved during the process of the study, and it was made the researcher happy.

To develop the limited vocabularies of the students' problem, the researcher suggested to use the new vocabularies found in the authentic article- materials' read by the students (reading the authentic materials was suggested to be used as the references to support the content knowledge) to be implemented in the dialogue created that should be presented in the business meeting presentation. The new vocabularies were implemented, and they were not only used for memorizing, but it was used to enrich the students' vocabulary and to improve the students' fluency. The students' writing on the form of the dialogue was a problem in the first project; the grammar mistakes done was almost around 40% on the dialogue's created. But after reading some authentic articles and doing a consultation, seemed the mistakes could be minimized, and the result was decreased in the second project, it was amazing that the students had made progress during the implementation of the study. It is in keeping with what Haerazi and Irawan (2020) conducted in their research in which authentic materials can help students to recognize the real English patterns.

The script of the students' first project designed was just only for presenting the assigned' s points in the project without trying to involve the design in creating the discussion or doing the augmentations to make the presentation looked dynamically and lifely as a natural meeting created outside the classroom, and the researcher was really disappointed on experiencing it because the presentation was flat. The improvement was made well after having feedback. The students did the performance by implementing the discussions and the argumentation during the second project of their presentation, as suggested by the researcher and the result was amazing, it seemed the problem was on the motivation and lack of self-confidence.

Comparing between the first project and the second project, the second one was much better since the students' capability, the students' fluency, the students' content knowledge, the students' creativities: on content knowledge, on students' performance and on setting the room, all were improved well. The performance that was created, gesture, expression, intonation, appreciation to someone's talk was played well; the nervous could be kept well; the PowerPoint created was excellent. The students' lack confidence which was faced as a problem has only appeared in the first project, but since the researcher implemented a model of the natural atmosphere in the classroom in which the teacher functioned as a facilitator, a counselor, and a manager, then students' enthusiasm was succeeding to be improved.

The students' responsibility improved was caused by the students' involvement in their learning in doing the project. The strategy of involving the students on the content knowledge (students' major subject), developing the content in the form of dialogue of the business meeting project, and simulated in the real performance of business meeting was a success to be a good way. The strategy applied was changed the transition from spoon-feeding strategy into independence strategy that made the second project was done successfully, the key was also coming from the result of how the researcher gave reinforcement toward the students' work since the reinforcement became the new stimulus for the students to do better in the future.

In the second project, the students' motivation, responsible and self- confidence were improved significantly. The students work harder and seriously comparing to the previous

project that effected on the result of the students' performance on doing the presentation. The students did the presentation quite well, and unexpectedly their products' produced to come to the above target of the teacher-researchers' mind. They were creative and innovative.

Students' responses to the questionnaire give a positive one. For instance, the question of "Is English important to be learned?' Students who chose English is very important to be learned who though that they are living in the global era. The need for English is important either in oral or in writing. Most big companies would need their employee to talk in English to be used as a means of communication. It would be unfortunate if we ignore English at this time being. The competition to get a job is very competitive, if we do not have a skill of English it would be a problem, by English, we could talk about Business, education, technology,   problems about social life an others. While 20 students chose, English is important to be learned. In the sense of some of the students' reference books are written in English, and they have to learn it to be used to complete their assignments and thought that campus is a place to study and to practice English. Fortunately, no one chose for the last chosen – English is not important to be learned, it might students already realized that it would be impossible to live with no English.

State Polytechnic of Malang is a Vocational Institution; the portion of practicing skills is higher than learning the theoretical knowledge. Speaking is not only tested in the end of every semester but also done in the students' final report test, which is used for the last test that was done before students get graduation – a comprehension test, so speaking skill has a bigger portion to be learned by the students. Students chose that the most important skill should be learned speaking, even though speaking was the most difficult skill to be learned since they have limited time to learn at school – students learn the English subject would depend on the English schedule and they only had limited time to practice the oral communication, it has happened that most students would not do the English practice outside the classroom. Seven students chose reading skills. The consideration was by reading the articles a lot, and it would help them to enlarge the content knowledge, learn the structure, and enlarge the vocabularies.

Another question is provided for students, such as "Is speaking skill needed to be practiced outside the classroom to improve the fluency? Students chose very needed to be practiced, learning a language should be done routinely, and it was used as a habit, take for some minutes to talk with the classmate or with their own in English that would improve their fluency. Those who already have the self-confidence to speak English would think to do English practice was important because 13 students are mentioning that it was not so needed since they though they have practiced in the classroom, and it was enough for them. Unfortunately, two students said it was not needed to practice speaking outside the classroom.

The question of How often does you practice oral communication. Students considered should be done often, learning a language need practices a lot, it should be used as a habit; practicing to express an idea or an opinion in English often would help them to talk automatically and helped them to increase their vocabularies because during the practice students would find some new words to be expressed and the practice would improve students' fluency. Students thought that when having the English class, they already did a practice (the students' reason were; too many assignments from other subjects so it would be impossible to consider only English as a focused subject, the major subject was accounting) while unluckily two students thought doing the presentation in the classroom was enough practice for them. Besides, the question of Why oral communication is important to be learned. Oral communication is important to be learned as it is an international language. Modern countries and some of developing countries think English must be learned. It is used to communicate in Business, education or in other fields in all countries in the world. Almost

all junior, senior high schools or universities in the world has an English subject in the curriculum since it is badly needed.

Motivation seemed is the first key to learn English (Haerazi, Vikasari, & Prayati, 2019). If there is no motivation, students would have no willingness to learn. The atmosphere and strategy implemented also has an important role that could influence a lot on the students' willingness to learn English. It is in line with Haerazi, Utama, and Hidayatullah (2020) who state that creating good atmosphere in EFL classes help students to acquire the language skills well. Twenty-nine students said, yes I do, we need it, it is important to have the English skill, I want to get a good future life, I like the subject the lecturer given, it is struggling, it arouses our critical thinking, it enlarges my knowledge not only in English but also in the major subjects we are learning. Two students said, not so special. We do the assignments because we have to do it. It must do it to complete the assignments. One student said I do not like English before. English is difficult for me. But after having the new model implemented, I hope I will change my mind by starting to like the subject.

All students liked the strategy implemented. The model really decreased the fear, motivated to do the discussion with the classmate for sharing opinions, and no anxiety appeared as the atmosphere created was natural. The role of the teacher (as a facilitator) affected a lot on the atmosphere and students' motivation. We did the project happily, and immediately we have responsibilities to do the best. We like our friends' tolerance and appreciation on processing doing our project. We developed our knowledge not only in English subjects but also on our major subject, including in operating the computer to create the animation in the PowerPoint. All students chosen were above 75. We liked doing the project using the model implemented, it was struggling and interesting. The project forced us to learn deeper about the subject we were learning. It was amusing. We enjoyed the atmosphere created, it was relaxing, but we worked seriously, everybody was busy with the responsible gotten. We could share our work happily and discussed it together. Tolerance was increased, and it made us happy in finishing the project.

What makes you active in doing the project by implementing the model proposed. Motivation and responsible made the students did the project well. The atmosphere created also affected doing it. Since the students could enjoy the atmosphere, no scare in expressing ideas or speak in English even though the way students delivered the speaking was not fluent, but the effort could be seen clearly, and the students felt they have already developed their English. What makes the students thought that sharping English was important; the answered given by the students was motivation. When students have a good motivation, then automatically, students wanted to learn better. In the Accounting Department (where I am working), English is not the major subject, that was why teachers really needed students' motivation as a means of a key to learning English. Thirty-two students answered that they needed English for their future lives because they wanted to work in a good office. Furthermore, they also said that they are living in the global era where English is needed everywhere that functions as an international language. Because of that reason, students needed to develop their English.

Conclusion

In summary, it could be concluded that implementing the natural atmosphere was an effective learning strategy, particularly because it promoted students' interactions. Obviously, active learning cultivated multifaceted thinking procedures and developed maintenance, absorption, comprehension, and appropriate use of course content. As a result, practicing presentations must be an experience offered to students.

REFERENCES

Dobson, James C. (1992). *The Strong-Willed Child*. Living Books. ISBN 0-8423-2335-X.

Francis, A. T., Olson, M., Weinberg, P. J., & Stearns-Pfeiffer, A. (2018). Not Just for Novices: The Programmatic Impact of Practice-Based Teacher Education. *Action in Teacher Education*, *40*(2), 119–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2018.1424053

González-Betancor, S. M., Bolívar-Cruz, A., & Verano-Tacoronte, D. (2019). Self-assessment accuracy in higher education: The influence of gender and performance of university students. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *20*(2), 101–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417735604

Haerazi, H., Prayati, Z., & Vikasari, R. M. (2019). Practicing contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach to improve students' reading comprehension in relation to motivation. *ENGLISH REVIEW: Journal of English Education*, *8*(1), 139–146. https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v8i1.2011

Haerazi, H., May Vikasari, R., & Prayati, Z. (2019). The Use of Scientific-Based Approach in ELT Class to Improve Students' Achievement and Classroom Interaction. *Register Journal*, *12*(2), 157–180. https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v12i2.157-180

Haerazi, H., Utama, I. M. P., & Hidayatullah, H. (2020). Mobile Applications to Improve English Writing Skills Viewed from Critical Thinking Ability for Pre-Service Teachers. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies (IJIM)*, *14*(07), 58. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v14i07.11900

Haerazi, & Irawan, L. A. (2020). The effectiveness of ECOLA technique to improve reading comprehension in relation to motivation and self-efficacy. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, *15*(1), 61–76. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i01.11495

Jacobs, G., Power, M., & Loh, W. (2002). *The teacher's sourcebook for cooperative. Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

Kemmis, S., & Mc Tagggart, R. (1989). *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin University Press.

O'Malley & Pierce, V. (1996). O'Malley, J.M. and L. Valdez Pierce. *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers*. White Plains: Longman.

Rachmawati, U. (2020). What lies behind the students' need in English for specific purposes: A reflection of needs analysis. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, *8*(2), 213–221. https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v%vi%i.2537

Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rebecca, R. (2001). *Integrated Skills in the ESL/EFL Classroom. resources*.marshalladulteducation.org/Integrated_Skills_in_the_ESL/EFL.

Slavin, R, (1995). *Cooperative Learning* (2nd edition). Boston MA, Allyn & Bacon

Ushioda, E. (2003). *Motivation as a socially mediated process*. In D. Little, J. Ridley,& E. Ushioda (Eds.),Learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom: Teacher, learner, curriculum, and assessment (pp 90-102), Dublin. Authentic.

Vercellotti, M. Lou. (2018). Do interactive learning spaces increase student achievement? A comparison of classroom context. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *19*(3), 197–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417735606