**PROMOTING STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK: DYNAMIC TALK! ACTIVITY**

*Amutha a/p M.Katharayan*
*Kolej Matrikulasi Johor*

*amuparva12@gmail.com*

**ABSTRACT**

*Being fearful to speak in English is quite common among second language learners. Students are reluctant to use the language and find it difficult to express their thoughts and opinions in English. With the aim to improve the researchers' pedagogical approach, the general objective of this research was to encourage students to speak in English.  Using Kemmis and McTaggart Model, this action research introduces Dynamic Talk! Activity as the intervention.  The intervention included assigning them with speaking topics for six weeks which were topics, picture, song and video clip. Data was collected from the reflections upon observing 53 Johor Matriculation College students of 2 different modules. Majority of students are basic and independent level user of English. This research was carried out for six weeks throughout the implementation of the activity. Findings showed that the students took lesser time to respond and they were more confident in using English orally. It is hoped that the experience would lower the students' nervousness level and enable them to score better in the MUET speaking component.*

*__Key words__: fearful, MUET, speaking component, speaking nervousness*

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The English learning objective has its general aim to produce students who are capable of using English not only in academic context but also in other social contexts. However, matriculation students study English for also another reason, which is to get prepared to sit for MUET (Malaysian University English Test). MUET which consists of four papers, namely; listening, speaking, reading and writing, is a determinant for the students to get a place in university. Among all the four papers, students seemed to be passive and hesitant to perform in speaking. This is because to be able to perform in speaking, they could not memorize the content. Instead, they need to have good strategies, confidence as well as content to be a good speaker. English lecturers agree that practice makes perfect and surely such reinforcement is very crucial to ensure the success of speaking. Besides, it is not uncommon for students to be anxious or nervous when they are asked to speak in English. Due to this, in our situation, majority of our students were usually very quiet in class. It was a real challenge for the lecturer to ask the students to speak in English.  According to some researchers, one of the challenges to teach English to Malaysian students, whether at the

primary, secondary or tertiary levels, was their anxiety level to speak in English (Badrasawi et al.,2020; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019 & Toubot et al., 2017). Based on the researcher experience as MUET speaking examiner, it was realized that the students often take a lot of time to start speaking or expressing their ideas in English. In class, most of the time, lecturer was seen as the one who was speaking throughout in the class with little participation from the students and usually those participated were only the same students. Majority of the students were usually fear or too shy to speak as they have limited vocabulary to express their thoughts. So, many depended on a few that were brave enough to voice out their opinions or respond to the issues discussed. This situation if continued, would affect the students' performance as speaking is a skill tested in MUET. Therefore, Dynamic Talk! Activity was conducted as an intervention to encourage students to develop the confidence to speak in English

## 2.0 SELF-REFLECTION ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

The researcher faces the same problems when preparing students for MUET speaking; the students were quite reluctant to speak in English. They also take long time to start speaking or expressing their ideas. The researcher had to find ways to initiate the students just to get a one word respond from students. Many opted to just listen and be quiet and look at each other. This resulted in very poor class participation and as expected if there are any responses, it came from the same students. Indeed, it was very frustrating for me as I was expecting more responses, opinions and views from students This situation was very demotivating for me. It was heart wrecking to be the ones 'speaking as one man show' or to be listening to my own voice most of the time. I asked my students to state their feelings about being in the Speaking lesson in the questionnaire given. As expected, many of them state that they did not have the confidence, anxiety, they were scared or too shy to speak in English, they were scared of making grammatical error and they had problem with their limited English vocabulary. The situation was even more daunting as they had just registered in college, thus, many hardly know each other and this discourage them to have conversation. This added to the uncomfortable feelings that they might be ridiculed or laughed at by a few who are proficient in English. All in all, based on my observations and interactions with the students, I concluded that the factors that hinder students from using English are as in Figure 1.
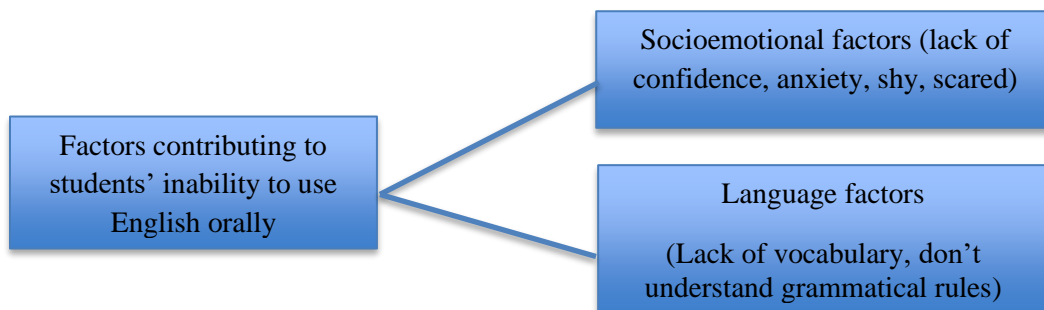


Figure 1: Teacher's Perception on Factors Contributing
To Students Inability to Use English Orally

From a survey carried out on the students' perception on learning English carried out in the first week of the Speaking lesson, it was found that 14 out of 23 or 61% of Account 17 students, while 10/16 (62%) of Computer Science 7 students and 9 out of 14 (64%) of Computer Science 6 students perceived that learning English is difficult. Majority of the students - 16/23 (75.0%) of Account 17 students, 11/16 (68%) of Computer Science 7 students and 10/14 (71%) of Computer Science 6 faced issues of being either quite shy or scared, and even lack the confidence to use English in front of others (Table 1).

Table 1: Students' Perception on Learning English

| ITEM | CLASS | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | A17 (n=23) | C6 (n=16) | C7 (n=14) |
| English is difficult | 14/23 (61%) | 9/14 (64%) | 10/16 (62%) |
| Shy/ scared/ lack of confidence to use English | 16/23 (75%) | 10/14 (71%) | 11/16 (68%) |

As shown in Table 2, some of the problems mentioned by students that contributed to this situation was their lack of vocabulary, generating ideas. Some also said revealed that they had to translate words from the mother tongue to English. This was also a contributing factor that caused them to keep quiet during the Speaking class.

Table 2: Problems in using English

| PROBLEMS | CLASS | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | A17 (n=23) | C6 (n=16) | C7 (n=14) |
| Lack of vocabulary | 21 (91.3%) | 12 (85.7%) | 14 (87.5%) |
| Difficulty in generating ideas | 16 (69.5%) | 10 (71.4%) | 10 (62.5%) |
| Parts of Speech | 16 (69.5%) | 10 (71.4%) | 10 (62.5%) |
| Translate to mother tongue | 15 (65.2%) | 10 (71.4%) | 11 968.7%) |

Through the sharing sessions on this issue, the researcher developed an action plan to improve the practice in order to encourage the students to speak. After the researcher's observation, it can be seen that students felt that they were incapable of using English in communication because they did not try to extract whatever English vocabulary ingrained in their memory.

In order to solve this problem, the researcher had to force them and encourage them to start using simple vocabulary in their conversation and it could be expanded by listening to the vocabulary used by their friends on the same topic. It is believed that, upon realising that they were able to respond, this would definitely be a motivation for the students to produce and use the language better and ultimately improve their confidence to use the language.

## 3.0 RESEARCH FOCUS

Students will be exposed to four language skills, that is, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. This research would focus on Speaking only. The focus of this research is to encourage the students' to be confident in speaking English. Most of my students from Computer Science and Accounting classes were not brave to communicate in English as they are lack of confidence to speak in English. This researcher tries to identify the factors of anxiety and motivation of Computer Science and Accounting students in Johor Matriculation College towards learning English Language. Language anxiety is the major factor in affecting the speaking skill of students and this result in their weakness and lack of motivation to use English as a medium of communication during formal and also informal situation. The serious effects of this problems towards the learning of students leads to the need to conduct this research.

## 4.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:
1)    To investigate the students' attitudes to respond in English within the time frame given.
2)    To analyse the students' confidence to speak English orally.

## 5.0 RESPONDENTS OF THE STUDY

The respondents were selected from three groups that were conveniently accessible to the researchers. The respondents were 30 Computer Science students and 23 Accounting students comprising a mixed ability group who was taught by the researcher. The speaking skills and techniques were taught to students in the formal classroom setting. Classroom interaction was three hours per week and only one hour was allocated for the teaching of speaking skills and its sub-skills.

## 6.0 ACTION RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

This research had followed the model of action research (Figure 2) proposed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1988 (as cited in Clark, el al, n.d). The target group for this research was Semester 1 students who are sitting for MUET which comprised of 53 students from Computer Science and Accounting. They came from diverse backgrounds and they are not from English speaking background. The students' language proficiency based on their SPM results, ranged from 1A to 8E. Their first language were languages of their mother tongue and only a few, usually those from the town, used English as their first language. This action research was based on the action research model introduced by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) that described research as "to plan, act, observe and reflect systematically' with the aim to improve one's teaching. Figure 2 below shows the four phases in the model.
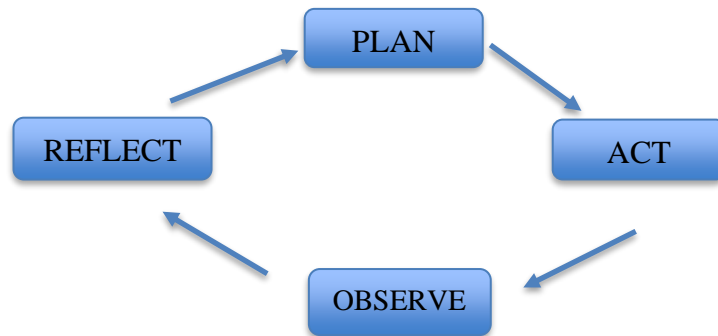
Figure 2: Kemmis & Mc Taggart (1988) Action Research Model

These phases were repeated several times in order to improve the intervention of this action research which was conducted for the period of three months starting from the planning stage to the report writing stage. The intervention was implemented during the Speaking lessons, specifically at the start of every lesson (the induction set) for six weeks. At the beginning of every lesson, students were asked to respond to the speaking topics given by the teacher. They were also not allowed to repeat what their friends had mentioned in their presentation. They were encouraged to respond by giving a word, phrases or sentences related to the situation. The following table shows the speaking topics used:

Table 3: Speaking Topics of Dynamic Talk! Activity

| WEEK | TOPICS |
|------|--------|
| 1 | What do you think about Johor Matriculation College? |
| 2 | My most interesting weekend. |
| 3 | I wish… (open-ended) |
| | Researcher Ponder |
| 4 |  What happened to her? Explain. |
| 5 | Song "Roar" by Katy Perry. What does the song tell you? What is the message you get from the song? |
| 6 | Video on environment -Pollution short film story 1.54 mins (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-BZrw36Oe0) What's happening to our world? Ask students to talk about the causes, effects and solutions of air pollution that they have watched. |
| | Researcher Ponder |

The followings summarized the steps taken in the implementation of this action research.

| STEP 1 | Pre intervention survey<br>This survey was carried out in the first week of the lesson. A survey was carried out to gather information on the students' perception, particularly on speaking in English. I observed their willingness to use the language. |
|---|---|
| STEP 2 | Activity briefing<br>The briefing focused on making students to understand the focus and purpose of the activity. They were reminded that their participation is important as that would help them to develop their confidence to speak in English with their friends or to present their views or opinions in classroom. |
| STEP 3 | Implementation of 'Dynamic Talk!'Activity<br>In every lesson, every student has to respond to the topics given. There were no correct or wrong responses as the activity was meant to encourage the students to speak in English. However, when there were responses that needed clarification as their explanation is unclear, students would be asked to explain. This gave them more opportunity to use the language. Approximately about 8 minutes was spent on this activity in every lesson. This step was repeated for six weeks with a different topic (Table 3). |
| STEP 4 | Post activity survey<br>After the six weeks, a survey was carried out to gather data on the students' perception of the activity. Data from this survey was an indication of the impact of the intervention on the students. |

## 7.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data for this research was gathered through lecturer's reflection for both objectives. After the intervention, from week 1 to week 3, I did reflection where I observed the outcome of my plan and refined it for the following weeks' action plan. After one week implementing the intervention, I found out that there were topics that seemed too easy for example, 'What do you think about Johor Matriculation College?' I had many one-word responses and the activity ended in less than 4 minutes. However, the other topics seemed to require more thinking on their part. I came to a conclusion that the level of difficulty was fair as that would give the students a good start, so that they would not feel that the task was difficult. However, I believed the topics should not be too easy in order to encourage the students to do some significant thinking. From the first week I realized that some students were taking advantage of situations, taking an easy way out by just changing the object in the phrases given.

For instance, when responding to the topic "most interesting weekend", a student started by saying 'going to beach", which was followed by "going to the park etc". Thus, I decided

to limit responses that were similar to only three students. Therefore, for the second week, I had more refined rules for the activity. From my observation of the first week of Dynamic Talk! Activity, some students were still reluctant, and took quite a long time to give their responses, I noticed that the activity had increased the students' participation in class. I saw their effort in trying hard to respond using whatever relevant vocabulary they had in their minds.

After the second week of intervention, I felt that the students were a little stressed with the topic. Perhaps because they had to think outside the box, which may perhaps pose a challenge to them to think and generate ideas. They had to spend long time on this activity. Thus, I refined my action plan for the second time and included chain story in the third week. It worked well as the students were enjoying by creating creative ideas of their classmates that made the story became very unpredictable with lots of twists and turns. Also, some students started to outsmart one another by trying to include different plots and characters in the story. Clearly showed they were beginning to feel at ease in using the language.

After the third week of Dynamic Talk! Activity upon seeing that the chain story made the activity more enjoyable for the students, I decided to include different speaking triggering tools. I used picture, song and video clip for the following weeks and surprisingly, the classes became lively. They were more participations, and majority did not stop at a word, they gave phrases and even sentences. What we were astounded with, was that many were no longer reluctant, they were no longer taking a lot of time constructing their responses. It seemed like they were now focusing on the ideas and not their language. Of course, that made the class a little bit noisier as everybody was clamoring for the teacher's attention so that they would be the next person to be called to respond. Finally, I can conclude that upon my observations of the students' participation, the intervention had encouraged the students to use the language. They were less reluctant and seemed more confident to use English orally. The topics were appropriately pitched at a level that was not too difficult with elements of creative and critical thinking. All in all, I did the four phases in Kemmis & Mc Taggart (1998) action research model (plan- action-observe -reflect) in a few cycles and in each cycle, I refined the activities and instructions. At the end of the six weeks, a simple survey was conducted to gather data on the students' perspective of the whole Just Speak! activity. The data showed that at first many of them (70%) felt a bit stressed with the activity, as they were not used to saying out their thoughts within seconds. But they finally enjoyed and looked forward to having the activity in every lesson (100%). All students wanted the activity to be carried out during Speaking lessons. The majority also indicated that the activity had managed to force them to think faster (60%) and this made them realized that they did have the vocabulary and that they could use English successfully (80%).

A class was asked to write down their feelings after experiencing the activity for six weeks. The responses were mainly positive. Some of them wrote that the activity enabled them "*to improve their thinking, "to think quickly"* and, *"to be more confident to use English"* All the students wanted the activity to be carried out during the Speaking lessons.

In conclusion, based on my observations of the students' participation throughout the six weeks that the intervention was carried out, and the comments and responses given by them, I believed that the intervention had enabled the students to be more confident to speak in English. They were also able to respond faster than before. Thus, both objectives had been achieved.

Table 4: Students' Perspective of the Dynamic Talk! Activity

| ITEM | DATA (%) |
|---|---|
| Felt a bit stressed with the activity | 70% |
| Enjoyed and looked forward to having the activity in every lesson | 100% |
| The activity had managed to force them to think faster | 60% |
| Students did have the vocabulary and that they could use English successfully | 80% |

8.0 REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

Learning English is what people do when they want to use the English language. In language learning, we often talk about language skills and language systems. Language skills include: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Language systems include vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse. A skill develops through practice. To be good in English, acquiring its vocabulary, rules and regulations only, are not enough. Students need to have the confidence to use the language. With confidence, their performance will portray the ability of that particular individual. As can be seen in the students' responses, this activity did enable the students to participate actively in class. Majority of students no longer spent too much time thinking of a respond as they were before exposed to the intervention. They knew that the vocabulary is there in their memory, and, they needed a little effort to extract and to say it out loud. Undoubtedly, this improved their confidence in generating ideas in English.

To me as an educator, my classes were lively. The activity did not make my students fluent English speakers instantly, but I could see them progressing. They were more acceptive of the language. They were more willing to give responses when they are asked to give their opinions or views or even generating ideas. I loved to see their expression when they cracked their heads for ideas especially when what they wanted to say was just mentioned by some other students in the class. I am very glad that my classes were no longer passive compared to at the beginning of the Speaking lessons.

I actually looked forward to listen to their responses as they were capable of generating some very creative ideas. Thus, I was learning from them as well. A respond from one student summarised their experience "…*I have to think fast, I just give the answer…and*

*from this activity I get new ideas from my other friends.... Can get many different ideas. I am more confident now because I have the vocabulary although my grammar is not good…".* This action research had enabled me to realise that the students need opportunities to use English orally for real purposes as such opportunities may not be available outside the classroom. Their level of proficiency in the language did not stop them from expressing their thoughts. Therefore, it is the intention of the researcher to develop a proper module on the intervention carried out, and to replicate this study with a different group, so that a more significant impact could be achieved.

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**ATTACHMENTS**

*Appendix A*

Name: _____          Course / Class: _____

Tick (/) the factors contributing to your inability to use English orally.

Students' Perception on Learning English

| NO | FACTOR | ITEM | TICK (/) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Socioemotional factors | Lack of confidence<br>Anxiety<br>Shy<br>Scared | |
| 2. | Language factors | Lack of vocabulary<br>Don't understand grammatical rules | |

Problems in using English

| NO | PROBLEM | TICK (/) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Lack of vocabulary | |
| 2. | Difficulty in generating ideas | |
| 3. | Parts of Speech | |
| 4. | Translate to mother tongue | |