THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH ON STUDENTS’ SPEAKING SKILLS
(KESAN PENDEKATAN KOMUNIKATIF TERHADAP KEMAHIRAN BERKOMUNIKASI PELAJAR)

NINA MARLINI AHMAD*, NORAIEN MANSOR, SURIA HANI IBRAHIM, WAN NURHAFEZA WAN SALAM, MOHD ZULKANAIN MAMAT AND HUSNA NURUL IZZAH JAMALUDDIN@ NOORDIN

Centre of Fundamental and Liberal Studies, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Terengganu.

*Corresponding author: emim@umt.edu.my

Abstract: Communicative approach has been accepted and widely acknowledged by many scholars and educators. In Malaysia, many schools and learning institutions have also adopted this approach in teaching language. Despite being applauded by many scholars, this study attempts to further explore the impact of communicative approach on students’ speaking skills. This study aims to look at the impact of the communicative approach adopted in Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program on students’ speaking skills among the participants after the duration of six months. The data for this study includes results of pre-test and post-test, informal interviews as well as observations from the instructors. The findings illustrate positive impacts of the approach on students’ speaking skills.

KEYWORDS: Communicative approach, speaking skills, impact, communication apprehension.

Introduction

English, despite of being the second language in Malaysia and taught as an important subject at both primary and secondary levels, is still considered a major problem for students to master. For years teachers have been changing and adopting various pedagogical approaches in order to help students to master and utilize English as a communication tool in their studies and careers later on. Malaysian government has also put forth a lot of efforts in implementing pedagogical changes in the education syllabus to achieve its aspiration in increasing the use of information communication and technology (ICT) in the educational system. There are many factors that have been identified by many teachers of English which lead to students’ anxiety. McCroskey (1977) identified a phenomenon known as communication apprehension (CA) to be a primary element associated with poor communication skills; when an ‘individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons”. Students also revealed the mixed feelings of anxiety, reticence, shyness, unwillingness, etc. when it comes to communicating or speaking in English.

However, since teaching and learning rely heavily on communication, it is vital that students enhance their communication skills...
as almost every activity in class necessitates communication. This study aims to look at the impact of the communicative approach adopted in Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program on students’ speaking skills among the participants after the duration of six months. Communicative approach is chosen to cultivate the ability to communicate properly and as students learn how to use English language in their daily communication, they are also simultaneously demonstrating their mastery of English (Hymes, 1972).

Methodology
The study was conducted at University Malaysia Terengganu through Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global Program which aimed to enhance the students’ communication skill by adopting the communicative approach. This program lasted for six months, starting from July 2013 to December 2013. The participants involved were 260 form four students from 13 schools in Terengganu. The activities such as Magic Box, Impromptu Speech, Cyber Chef, I am the Prime Minister, Role plays, Personality Talk, Movie review, Drama, and presentations were specifically designed for students to communicate, share and exchange ideas as well as interact among each other using English.

An impromptu speech was used in the pre and post-tests to rate the students’ performances especially their speaking skills. The components that were measured include content, delivery, fluency, language accuracy and total numbers of sentences. Pre-test was conducted in the second meeting while post-test in the second last meeting before the program ended. Marks for the pre and post tests were awarded without informing the students to reduce their anxiety and lessen the apprehension during the speech. The data for this study gathered mostly from the observation of teachers involved, informal interviews with the students’ and pre and post-tests results.

Research Findings
From the observation of teachers involved in the program, they have seen the positive impacts in the students’ level of confidence which has increased tremendously among most of the students in their classes. This shows that communicative approach has indeed succeeded in promoting and boosting students’ confidence. Students who were unwilling to speak at the beginning of the program became more active in participation towards the end and some even gained more confidence than the others. Not only did they gain confidence to speak in front of everybody but also with the teachers.

Communicative activities that require group discussion managed to improve the students’ communication strategies where they were seen to freely expressed and shared ideas with other group members. Students were also able to hold and maintain the discussion in their groups and sometimes exceeded the time given for the discussion. During the discussion, they were agreeing and disagreeing, justifying opinions, stating facts, and coming to a consensus.

Another communicative activity that seems to really excite the students was drama competition. Among other activities, the drama competition was chosen by most students as the best activity and has great impact on the students’ speaking skills. Process Drama or “educational drama” focuses on the teachers and students working together in dramatic world development, where participants build communicative competence and confidence through the process of working together (Liu, 2002). Students did not feel shy, afraid or nervous acting in the drama because all of them are participating. Since drama uses authentic situation, it also helped students to prepare themselves for real-life communication. During their practices, they made their own decision through trial and error in order to make sense and understand their roles. Apart from drama, role plays also exposed them to real-life situations and experience where they learned to use appropriate communication skills required in different situations. Richards
(2006) mentions that activities that let students use language in authentic situations focusing on real communicative contexts contribute to communicative practice.

Emphasis on pair and group work activities left a great impact on students’ speaking skills too, where they learned from listening to the language used by other members, and later spoke more English language than they did previously. Through pair and group work, students also increase their motivational level which helped them to develop fluency when speaking (Richards, 2006). Games are also used where they were able to learn new words and build their vocabulary (Fang, 2010). This approach has indeed encouraged students’ participation and prepared students for real-life communication. Most importantly, communicative approach could actually encourage low proficiency students to participate (Radzi, Azmin, Zolhani & Abdul Latif, 2007) because they did not feel shy when working in pairs or groups.

The most unsurpassed impact would have to be the positive feedbacks from the English school teachers, where they revealed that their students gained more confidence in voicing out their opinions compared to their classmates. One of the teachers was also quite pleased because the students did very well in their oral test after the program completed. She mentioned that the students were more communicative, they had performed better than their previous oral test. The students themselves also admitted that they have improved a lot in their communication skills that some of them were even appointed to help other classmates.

The results of the students’ pre and post-tests also indicate very significant changes in the percentage of every component being rated during the impromptu speeches. Figures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 show the percentages of each component measured in the impromptu speeches of both tests.

From the 260 students, 169 students took the pre-test and 152 students took the post-tests. Students who took both tests were 122. Results

![Figure 1.1: Component: content.](image1)

![Figure 1.2: Component: Fluency.](image2)

![Figure 1.3: Component: Delivery.](image3)

![Figure 1.4: Component: Language accuracy.](image4)
from the graph indicate the percentage ranging from very weak, weak, intermediate, good and excellent levels of students’ performances. Apparently graphs for most of the components show that the percentages increase from intermediate, good and excellent levels in the post-tests. Similarly, the number of sentences uttered by students also increased from less than 10 sentences in the pre-test to 30 sentences in the post-test.

Most students pointed out in the informal interview that speaking became easier for them because they get to practice speaking during the class with their classmates and also when they have to do presentations on the tasks given. From the results, it is clear that communicative activities conducted in the classes have brought about positive impacts on these students’ communication skills.

Conclusion
The findings exhibit great impacts of communicative approach on students’ speaking skills adopted in Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program. It is indeed enlightening to experience the improvements of these students when it comes to communicating with others. The first few meetings they came to class tongue-tied, but at the end of the program most of them managed to overcome their apprehension in communication. The study sought to provide some useful insights to language instructors by looking at the impacts of communicative method in the teaching of language especially focusing on communication.

Communicative approach undoubtedly creates a friendly and interactive learning environment, thus it should be implemented widely in the future. When students are presented with learning environment that offers them a lot of opportunity to use English in the class, they will get better chance at mastering English via communication. As claimed by Howatt [1984, cited in Rudiger-Harper (n.d)] “language is acquired through communication” or best described as “learning to use English” and “using English to learn it”.

References


*Journal of Business and Social Development Volume 2(1) 2014: 63-67*