Improving students' speaking competence through communicative activities
(a classroom action research in the tenth grade at SMA Negeri 7 Surakarta in
2008/2009 academic year)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

SMA Negeri 7 Surakarta is a Senior High School which has been holding regular program since 1984/1985 Academic Year. A regular program is a program in which the students finish their study in three years. For the first Academic Year, 1984/1985, it recruited 80 students whose qualifications matched with the requirements demanded by the school. At that time, SMA Negeri 7 as "Sekolah Unit Gedung Baru" was under the guidance of SMA Negeri 3 in Kerkop so the input of the school was good. It can be seen that 70% of them continued their study to University. The following Academic Year, 1985/1986 there were 120 students recruited and this time SMA Negeri 7 moved to Tipes, Jl. Mr. Muh. Yamin 79 Surakarta. At present, there are 24 classes consisted of 8 classes of grade X, 8 classes of grade XI, and 8 classes of grade XII. Each class consists of more or less 40 students and is equipped with a fan, a TV set, a VCD player, an OHP, and white board. The class has complete

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facilities with the hope that these support the teaching and learning process so that the school output will be good.

The requirements that have been owned by SMA Negeri 7 Surakarta to follow this program are as follows: the average mark of each subject namely Indonesian, Matehematics and English is not less than seven. It must be proved by giving original SKHUN (Surat Keterangan Hasil Ujian Nasional).

Related to the above, it can be seen that actually the students of regular program have been selected based on certain requirements. Academically they are clever students. Even though they have been relatively selected, the fact didn't show as what we expect. As human beings, they had weaknesses in certain things that were caused by many factors. One of them was from extrinsic influence which didn't support their talents and competences. It could be caused by the teacher, the surrounding community, the students themselves, and so on.

One of the weaknesses which they had in learning English according to the writer's observation was speaking competence. Even most of the students got difficulties in this matter. In this case the writer classified the difficulties into two parts, qualitative and quantitative.

Based on the quantitative data, from their formative test the writer found that the students who got mark more than 80 were only four students and those who got 70 to 80 were five students and the others got less than 70 so the average mark was 64. While based on the qualitative data from the interview, the writer found they didn't show their good speaking competence. From 38 students the writer

interviewed, 30% of them often mispronounced certain word(s), often misunderstood with the expected answer, didn't have good structure, and didn't have fluent expressions as well. They had difficulties to express their own English orally or to response to someone else's questions because they rarely practiced speaking English and had very limited vocabulary.

When the teacher asked them about their difficulties in expressing their mind in English orally, eight of them said that they didn't really have very serious problem in learning English. Five of them stated that they actually enjoyed learning spoken English but they realized that their vocabulary was still limited. Four of them said that they got difficulties in expressing and responding someone else's questions. Six students stated that they didn't have good structure so they were afraid to make mistakes in speaking English with others.

However, according to the teacher's observation, the students actually have good motivation in studying English and in improving their achievement. This can be seen from their attention to the teacher's explanation, enthusiasm in joining the lesson. Besides, their structure and vocabulary needed in spoken English were relatively good.

The causes of speaking problems can be traced from these sources, namely the students' and the teacher. Students didn't have enough time to practice or to express their own English so that they could not interact one another in English simultaneously. They tended to be shy, nervous, doubt, inferior, and afraid to make mistakes because they seldom used their own English to communicate with others.

From the teacher point of view, it is noted that the teacher oriented her teaching at the written test. There was no specifically allocated time to evaluate the students' speaking competence. This caused the teacher tend to ignore teaching speaking communicatively. The teacher still teaches the students monotonously because she didn't apply various teaching techniques in the classroom. The teacher didn't promote active learning which caused the students' low participation in the classroom. There was only limited time for speaking practice and this made the situation worse. Furthermore, in teaching English speaking, the teacher taught a certain topic and explained the expression concerning the topic while the students listened to the teacher's explanation and taking notes. Then, the teacher gave the students a model dialogue taken from the students' worksheet and the teacher read it in front of the class. After reading the dialogue, the teacher asked the students to repeat the dialogue after her. Finally, she asked the students to memorize the dialogue and practiced it in front of the class. When the students finished practicing it, they were asked to answer the questions dealing with the topic in written form. When the students could answer the questions, the teacher would be very satisfied. Furthermore, the teacher still teaches the students monotonously without realizing that it would make the students bored and even they lost their attention in the teaching and learning process. This situation made the students unable to understand the lesson easily because of their lost interest and participation. In this case interest is very important factor to consider in designing teaching and learning activities for the students. To solve this problem, the teacher should be able to apply the right

technique and approach which can improve the students' interest in the learning process taken place in the classroom. They should be able to create good atmosphere that will affect the students' enthusiasm in learning process.

Dealing with the last point, the teacher has to be able to make the students participate in discussing the materials actively so that they are able to understand what they are learning and also express their own English orally. The teacher has to use appropriate approach, design and procedures in managing and creating the class lively. An effective teacher typically possesses a repertoire of teaching methods and an ability to select the appropriate method for curriculum and students' need (Henson and Eller, 1999: 307). Higher students achievement is related to teachers' use of direct and active instruction (Good & Brophy, 1997 in Henson and Eller, 1999: 309). Here, direct instruction means students spend most of their time during the school day being taught or supervised by teachers instead of working on their own.

In this case, one of the techniques suggested for developing speaking competence is communicative activities. Communicative activities create demands on learners to express themselves effectively in fast changing and often uncertain situations but equally they must listen, comprehend and interpret speakers in those same conditions (Nation and Thomas, 1988: vi). They also said that above all, they are learning to control the two sides of the process of negotiation of meaning, which is central to both communication and learning the second language. Furthermore, they stated that speaking and listening are both simultaneously developed through communicative activities. There are three stages in teaching speaking, namely

introducing new language, practice, and communicative activities (Harmer, 199: 50).

He says that communicative activities are those which exhibit the characteristics at

the communicative end of our continuum. Students are involved in activities that give

both the desire "to communicate" and a purpose which involve them in varied use of

language. The activities are vital in a language classroom since here the students can

do their best to use the language as individuals, arriving at a degree of language

autonomy. Conversational skills could be acquired through doing communicative

activities such as situational role-plays, problem solving, monologue, games,

information transfer, and information-gap exercises. These will help students to

become better conversationalists (Dornyei and Thurrell, 1992: x). Conversations are

excellent examples of the interactive and interpersonal nature of communication.

"Conversations" are cooperative ventures (Hatch & Long, 1980: 4).

According to Richards (1990: 70 – 77), two major approaches characterize

"current teaching of conversation, an indirect approach in which learners are more or

less loose to engage in interaction, and a direct approach that "involves planning a

conversation program around the specific micro skills, strategies, and processes that

involved in fluent conversation.

There are six types of classroom speaking performance namely, imitative,

intensive, responsive, transactional (dialogues), interpersonal (dialogues) and

extensive (monologues) (Brown, 2001: 271 – 274). They can be in the form of task-

based instruction. In task-based instruction, the priority is not the bits and pieces of

language, but rather the functional purposes for which language must be used

(Brown, 2001: 243). He also states that this task-based instruction focuses on a whole set of real-world tasks themselves. He further says that input for tasks can come from a variety of authentic sources, speeches, conversations, narratives, public announcement, cartoon strips, interviews, oral descriptions, media extracts, games and puzzles, photos, letters, poems, directions, invitations, textbooks, diaries, songs, telephone directories, menus and labels. Finally, he says that in task-based teaching a well-integrated approach to language teaching asks teachers to organize their classroom around those practical tasks that language users engage in "out there" in the real world.

The talk produced by classroom communication activities involves many of the language functions which are common in use of the language outside the classroom. (Nation & Thomas, 1988: 1). However, many classroom communication activities differ from these "outside" activities in that they contain features that are there to make them effective ways of learning second language, they further say. These features include role play, an outcome, a procedure to follow and there are challenges to the learners. They also say that these features help achieve the learning goal of the speaking activity and motivate the learners and encourage them to join in the activity. The language learning goals are most easily seen in "pure" forms of speaking activities, such as discussion, story telling, and describing. They are used to show how activities for developing the speaking skill can be built up from simpler activities by adding from a limited range of features.

According to 2006 Curriculum or KTSP, the teaching activity focuses on understanding texts, constructing texts, and carrying out active interaction. Students learn both dialogue and monologue texts. The dialogue text, either transactional or interpersonal dialogues are practiced during the classroom interactions. Besides, the students also learn some monologue texts. The monologue texts are taught through two cycles namely the spoken and written cycle. Each cycle consists of four steps i.e. building knowledge of the field (BKOF), modeling, joint construction, and independent construction. According to the previous practices, in teaching dialogues and monologues, the students get a difficulty on modeling step. Their fluency in speaking is insufficient due to the slow response to expressions, lack of understanding of the meaning of expressions, and inappropriateness of expressions. It is suggested that the students must be given treatment to improve meaning because meaning is paramount (Brown, 2001: 45). It is hoped that the teacher includes the students' weaknesses in the modeling step.

Communicative activities as stated in the previous explanation is suggested solution to improve the students speaking competence because they are language techniques that are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes, they use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom which are all some characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching or CLT (Brown, 2001: 41). Communicative activities are beneficial to my classroom. In communicative activities, teacher has a lot of opportunities to develop various activities such as

situational role-plays, games, problem solving, information-gap exercises, discussion, story telling, describing, information transfer, etc. that create enjoyment and that teachers find most satisfying. This is particularly true if the communication activities have clear outcomes and the learners have clear jobs to do (Nation & Thomas, 1988: 12). The clear outcomes, clear instruction to students' jobs, enjoyment, chance to speak and communicate in the target language give solution of students' low participation, problem of limited time in speaking practice, increase fluency, speed response to expressions, improve understanding of the meaning of expressions, and appropriateness of expression.

Based on the background above the writer has strong perception that communicative activities are solutions to overcome the problem of improving students' speaking competence.

B. Problem Formulation

Based on the background of the study, the writer would like to know whether the use of communicative activities in teaching speaking skill can improve the students' English speaking competence. The problem can be formulated as follows :

1. Do communicative activities improve the students' speaking competence in learning English?

2. If they do, to what extent is the improvement?

3. What is the response of the students towards the use of communicative activities in speaking class?

C. The Objectives of the Study

Based on the background of the study and the formulation above, there are some objectives that are expected to be achieved in the study.

1. Identifying whether communicative activities improve the students' speaking competence.

2. Identifying to what extent the teaching technique of using communicative activities in teaching English speaking can make progress to learning process and to the students' speaking competence.

3. Describing and or evaluating the response of the students towards the use of communicative activities in speaking class.

D. The Benefits of the Study

The research result is expected to be able to give some benefits for the teacher, the students, school, and the readers.

1. For the teacher

The result of this study can give description about how to use the teaching technique in teaching English effectively to Senior High School students.

2. For the students

The result of this study can improve students' speaking competence.

3. For readers

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The result of this study probably will be used as the reference for those who want to conduct a research in English teaching process, especially in improving the students' English speaking competence.

4. For the school

The result of this study can improve the school quality, especially in English teaching and learning.