

IMPROVING THE SPEAKING ABILITY OF THE TENTH GRADERS OF *SMK NEGERI 1 SINGOSARI* MALANG THROUGH THE THINK-PAIR- SQUARE STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to improve the students' speaking ability using the Think-Pair-Square strategy. The research was intended to describe how Think-Pair-Square strategy can improve the speaking ability of the tenth graders of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*. The research adopted a collaborative classroom action research in which the researcher and the collaborator worked together in conducting the research. The researcher acted as the teacher while the collaborator observed the teacher and the implementation of Think-Pair-Square strategy. This study was conducted in two cycles using the following procedure: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. Each cycle consisted of three meetings. The data of the research were gathered through the following instruments: observation checklist, field notes, and questionnaire. The subjects of the research were 31 students of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*. The finding of the research indicated that Think-Pair-Square strategy was successful in improving students' speaking ability. It is suggested that English teachers apply the Think-Pair-Square strategy since it can be a practical contribution on how to improve the students' speaking ability with more practice of using oral communication in

their real and natural communication activities, and as relevant knowledge about the teaching of speaking. It is also recommended to the institution, that the findings of the research be used for decision making that the teaching of speaking in this institution has to use Think-Pair-Square strategy. For the future researchers, the findings of this research can become a good reference as strategy to teach speaking.

Keywords: Think-Pair-Square Strategy, Speaking Ability

Introduction

Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) Negeri 1 Singosari Malang is one of the public schools in Malang Regency. The purpose of the teaching English in *SMK* is enabling students to communicate the target language in spoken and written form (KTSP, 2006). Based on the school-based curriculum of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*, the students are expected to be able to use functional skills in English. Therefore, the focus of teaching English in *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang* is mostly on speaking and reading. The curriculum focuses on speaking because 60% of the school graduates work in foreign companies around Indonesia such as PT. TRAKINDO UTAMA, ALTRAX 1978, PAMA, etc. where English is as a means of communication, spoken and written.

In line with the reason, Folse (2006:3-4) states that when students refer to second or foreign language learners, their primary goal seems to be speaking. Harmer (1998: 2) also reveals that a learner will be considered to master the target language when he is able to use the language in speaking.

Speaking is a crucial means of presenting communication among individuals, and people usually judge individuals in the way they maintain the communication effectively. Therefore, people should be able to communicate successfully and acceptably as well as intelligibly. Furthermore, speaking relates to successful life, since it occupies an important position both individually and socially. According to Nunan (1991:39) to most people, mastering the art of speaking is an important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to perform a conversation in a language.

However, students find speaking as the most difficult skill to master. As Lindsay and Knight (2006:57) say that speaking is a complex task since it involves putting the message together, communicating, and interacting with other people, and learners need a lot of practice to develop this skill. According to Huda (1999: 72) the oral communication is an important skill required for the English language teachers, but it is the most difficult skill to develop. Speaking is a difficult skill for students to acquire and also a difficult skill for teachers to develop.

As a teacher, the researcher had conducted an observation during his teaching and found some problems that cause the teaching of speaking is not successful. The problems he found are: 1) the students' speaking ability is low; and 2) they do not seem to be motivated which is indicated by the low involvement in the speaking class.

The result of the preliminary study showed that most of the students were not motivated in the teaching and learning of speaking. The result of the questionnaire supports the students problem in the teaching and learning process. The students' responses show that speaking was the most difficult skill since almost 90% students feel that it is difficult.

The teacher concludes that the factor causes the above problems is the monotonous technique used by the teacher. In this case, the teacher gave only a handbook containing examples of dialogs which has been constructed in accordance with the grammar being taught. The teacher gave the students as to show to read them. Afterwards, the students were asked to simulate in front the class in pairs. Sometimes the students were asked to make a similar conversation, and before they practiced, they were allowed to ask questions about the conversation.

This technique cannot increase the students' speaking ability of the tenth graders of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*. Therefore, the speaking class is considered the most scary and uninteresting class. Thus, the researcher concluded that the teaching of speaking in this school was not effective yet since 77.5% of the students got lower than the minimum passing grade, 75.

Concerning the problems, the researcher decides to find activities which are appropriate with the students' need, interest, relaxing, fun, and are able to get the students involved, and help them to get over their apprehension in the classroom. As Gebhard (1998: 49) states that the teacher should create activities to get students involved in interacting in English. In addition, the use of an appropriate strategy can attract student's attention toward the presented material and make the students participate actively in the learning activities (Manoppo, 2004:5).

Therefore, it is crucial to implement a strategy that can solve the problems, that is, a method that can bring students out of boredom, competitive and individual class atmosphere to a more student-centered strategy and that can improve students speaking ability.

There is a variety of strategies to get students involved and engaged in speaking activities. Cooperative learning is one of the strategies. Flowers and Ritz (199: 28) define cooperative learning as teaching strategy where teams of two or more work together on learning tasks. Each member of the teams brings special talent to the group, i.e., concrete or analytical abilities. Also other team members cooperate on the achievement of the tasks and learn from each other. As a result, students learn both academic and social skills from cooperative learning environment. In other words, cooperative learning stresses academic skills of the students or students' achievement that clearly defined curricular goals. Furthermore, cooperative learning aims at increasing students' academic achievement through a good social relationship with one another in a classroom.

Joubert (1997: 32) describes cooperative learning as a structured instructional strategy which emphasizes active learning through interpersonal interaction, where students act as partners with the teacher and each other. The role players in the cooperative learning are therefore teachers and students.

Furthermore, the result of using cooperative learning strategy shows that students who have opportunities to improve academic performance, lead to great motivation toward learning, to increase time on task, to improve self-esteem, to lead to more positive social behaviors (Yahya and Huie, 2006: 25)

From the benefits of cooperative learning for students, this study, therefore, proposes a strategy to improve students' speaking ability by using cooperative learning. Among a number of cooperative learning strategies, Think-Pair-Square is chosen to be applied in the classroom to improve students' speaking ability. Think-Pair-Square is a strategy developed by Kagan (1986: 2) to provide students with "food for thoughts" on given topics, enabling them to formulate individual ideas and share these ideas with another students (Instructional Strategies Online: 2004: 2).

The previous researches which are closely related to this study have shown that Think-Pair-Share strategy, which has the similar structure as Think-Pair-Square, has grown out of the cooperative learning and wait-time research. There are some research that focused on the Think-Pair-Square strategy. Safarudin (2004) focuses on Think-Pair-Share-Square strategy for improving reading comprehension. The findings of the research showed that the students' reading comprehension improved by using Think-Pair-Share-Square Strategy. The students gained better average scores, the score increased from 59 to 75 after the implementation of the strategy. The students also have a better social and communication skills, in which the high achievers gave contribution to the low achievers and vice versa. Furthermore, a research done by Juhari (2009) on improving reading comprehension skills of the eleventh graders of MA *Darul Lughah Wal Karomah Kraksan Probolinggo* through Think-Pair-Share Strategy showed that his students' average score in reading improved, from 56 in the preliminary study to 70 after the implementation of the study and they also actively involved in the teaching and learning process.

The Think-Pair-Share or another variation of it could help the students improve their reading ability. The Think-Pair-Share strategy was developed by Frank Lyman

(1981) which is believed to be applicable for all levels and all subjects. The procedure is simple: after asking a question, tell students to think silently about their answers. Then ask them to pair up with a partner to compare or discuss their responses. Finally, call randomly on a few students to summarize their discussion or give their answer. When the students are called on to share their answers with the class, many of them feel reluctant and shy to speak up in front of other students. It makes them cannot show their best performance to get good scores. This strategy cannot help the students of X OTR 3 because 80% of the students feel shy when they find themselves sharing ideas in front of the class. Therefore, this research employs Think-Pair-Square strategy which suits the characteristics of the students.

Based on the importance of speaking, the strength of Think-Pair-Square, some researcher experiences, and positive finding of previous studies, the researcher will focus his research on improving speaking skill of the tenth graders of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang* using the Think-Pair-Square strategy. This strategy can foster the students' motivation to speak more. When they are given time to think about the problem being posed, it will help them to be ready to speak and share their ideas about the topic. At the second step of this structure, each student has a chance to share their ideas with their partner sit right next to him/her. This share-session will help them build their confidence since each student shares his/her ideas with a friend she/he is comfortable to speak with since most of the students of X OTR 3 were shy to speak with their teacher or friends they are not close with. This think-time is very useful for students who are shy or reluctant to speak up. In this session they will also exchange ideas to complete the task given. Each student contributes ideas and helps each other to reach the right answer or

opinions about the topic discussed. The helps from another student will foster the student to speak because they have to answer his/her friend's question, at the same time the speaker are feeling motivated.

The last step of this structure is squaring in which each pair will turn into another so they will form groups of four. By having this session they feel more confidence because they have shared and exchanged ideas during the sharing session. The sharing-session helps the students to gain confidence and function as rehearsal to make them ready to speak better in the squaring session. During this session, the students have already been ready to exchange ideas with other partners from different pair. The power of this strategy is seen from this last step. Squaring session which consists of four students will help the students to perform well since they share their ideas within a small group. Harmer (2007: 346) states that a major reason for the reluctance of some students to take part in speaking activities is that they find themselves having to talk in front of big group. A way of counteracting this is by making sure that they get chances to speak and interact in smaller groups. Concerning the power and the positive finding of the previous research, this research will employ Think-Pair-Square strategy to improve the students speaking ability in *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*

Research Problem, Objective, and significance

Based on the research background, the research question is formulated as "How can Think-Pair-Square strategy improve the speaking ability of the tenth graders of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*?" In relation to the research problem, the objective of the research is to investigate "how Think-Pair-Square strategy improves the speaking ability of the tenth graders of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*".

The findings of this research are expected to be useful for the English teachers, the institution, and the future researchers. For the English teachers, the finding of the research can be a practical contribution to solve problems of unsatisfactory speaking ability of the students and on how to improve the students' speaking ability with more practice of using oral communication in their real and natural communication activities.

For the institution, the findings are expected to be useful for decision making that the teaching of speaking in this institution has to use Think-Pair-Square as a strategy. For the future researchers, the findings of this research can become a good reference when they want to conduct similar research. If there should be some weaknesses of this research, the future researchers may be aware of them so that they can conduct a better research.

Research Design

This research is designed as collaborative classroom action research, because it is used to overcome problems confronted by the researcher as the teacher in his classroom. According to Suyanto and Sukarnyana (2001: 21), action research is one of the strategies to improve the quality of education through more effective classroom practice. It is an inquiry which is carried out in order to understand, to evaluate and then modify, in order to improve educational program (Bassey, 1998 cited in Koshy, 2005: 8)

In conducting action research, the researcher acts as practitioner and the collaborator will be the observer. The collaborator gets some training for the implementation of the strategy on how to observe using the observation sheets and how to assess the students. This research is directed to develop the teaching strategy in order to overcome the classroom's problems in teaching learning speaking.

The researcher implemented classroom action research model as the cyclical process by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1998: 595) cited in Koshy (2005: 4) which consists of four steps (1) planning, (2) implementing, (3) observing, and (4) reflecting. Planning stage focuses on how to set up a teaching and learning strategy to be used to overcome problems confronted by the class. In implementing stage, the researcher tries out the strategy. During the observing stage, the researcher collects data based on the implementation of the strategy. Finally on the reflection stage, the conclusion is drawn. Based on the conclusion, the original plan can be revised and changed to a new cycle.

Research Setting and Subjects

This research is conducted in *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*. It is located at Jln. Raya Mondoroko No. 3 Singosari Malang, East Java. The reasons of choosing this school as the setting, is the researcher is one of the English teachers there. The subjects of the study are the first grader of *Otrotonik* three (OTR 3) class of *SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang*. The class consists of 32 males students. The researcher chooses this class because this class tends to be more passive compare to other classes, for example *Teknik Permesinan* two (TPM 2) and *Otrotonik* two (OTR 2) which the researcher teaches. Based on the result of the preliminary study, this class has problems, namely: 1) the students' motivation to study was low, and 2) the students' speaking ability was very poor, 70% of the students get lower score than the minimum passing grade 75.

Taking the problems into account, the researcher implements the Think-Pair-Square as strategy to teach speaking. This strategy is beneficial to get the students involved in the speaking activities since they work in a small group where each student has more opportunity to speak and feel less reluctant. It is in line with Harmer (2007: 345-346) who states that a major

reason for the reluctance of some students to take part in speaking activities is that they find themselves having to talk in front of a big group. A way of counteracting this is by making sure that they get chances to speak and interact in a smaller group. After the implementation of the strategy it is expected that the students' motivation increases, and the students' speaking ability improves about particular material in accordance with the syllabus. The syllabus states that students can communicate in English in the novice level which focuses on the explaining the activities going on in their closest environment and understanding, producing simple communication for social interaction and personal interest.

Research Procedure

In conducting research, the researcher uses steps proposed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (2000: 595) cited in Koshy (2005: 4) with several adaptation, namely preliminary study, planning the action, implementing the action, observing, and reflecting

Preliminary Study

The preliminary study is conducted to gain the data about the real problem faced by the teacher during the teaching of speaking. The result of the preliminary study was: (1) the students' motivation in learning speaking is low, and (2) the students' speaking ability is not satisfactory.

Planning

Planning in this section, the activities dealing with the planning of action cycle are conducted. Those activities are stated by having a meeting between the researcher to discuss the planning which covers preparing the action, providing the suitable strategy to use, designing the model of the lesson plan, preparing the materials, preparing the observation sheets and field notes, and the last deciding the criteria of success.

Designing Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan is needed as a guideline in implementing the action. In this section, the researcher and the collaborator design and develop it. It is designed per meeting in each cycle. In this study there were three meeting for one cycle. The lesson plan made covers (1) the instructional objectives, (2) instructional materials, (3) teaching learning activities and procedure, and (4) assessment.

The Procedure of the Think-Pair-Square Strategy

There are three activities were done in the implementation of Think-Pair-Square strategy namely pre-speaking activity, whilst-speaking activity, and post-speaking activity. The three phase of the Think-Pair-Square strategy were done during the whilst-speaking activity.

Preparing Research Instrument

Before conducting the research, the researcher prepares the research instruments such as observation sheets, field note, and questionnaire to observe and record the data within the process of implementing the Think-Pair-Square.

Criteria of Success

- 85% of the students achieved more than the minimum passing grade, 75.
- 85% or more of the students are actively involved in the teaching of speaking

Implementing

In implementing strategy, the researcher divides it in three meetings, the first meeting is introduction of the strategy, the second meeting is implementation of Think-Pair-Square, and the third meeting is another implementation of the strategy with different topic. In this case, the researcher as the practitioner teaches speaking.

The researcher and collaborator also observe the students' involvement during the teaching and learning process by using observation checklist and field notes. The researcher and the collaborator bring the field notes to write an additional information or data, which are not covered by observation checklist.

Observing the Action

Observing is done to collect the data. The data are gained from the students' performance and any aspects or events which are happening during the implementation of the action. In this activity the researcher uses camera, observation sheets, field notes, and questionnaire.

Research Findings

Think-Pair-Square is an effective strategy to be applied in improving the students speaking ability within two cycles.

This section focuses on the findings on Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. It covers the students' performance in the Think-Pair-Share strategy, the students' ability in performing oral report, and the students' involvement toward the implementation of Think-Pair-Square strategy. The data obtained were about the students' activity during the implementation of the strategy and to know the differences and the similarities of the result of the two cycles. The data was presented and analyzed separately.

Research Findings in Cycle 1

This part presents the findings in Cycle 1. It includes the result of the students' speaking ability and the result of the observation toward the students' involvement during the three meetings of the speaking class activities. The first meeting was about introduction and implementation of Think-Pair-Share strategy. The second meeting was the implementation of the Think-Pair-Square

and the last meeting was done to take scores of the students.

Students' Speaking Achievements in Cycle 1

The students' performance during the Think-Pair-Square strategy was scored individually while they were discussing about the topic being posed within the pair or square. Related to the field notes, they made a lot of mistake in term of pronunciation and vocabulary. The students' final product of speaking which was obtained through observing their performance during the discussion (pairing and squaring) was analyzed and assessed by using the analytical scoring rubric adapted from O'mally and Pierce(1996:67) and Folse (1999).

In relation to the students' achievement, it was found that most of the students were not able to speak English using good pronunciation, they used too much hesitation in expressing their idea about the topic they were discussing, and they also spoke using limited vocabulary. Besides, most of the students used bad choice of words. When they looked up their dictionaries, they just took the word without paying attention to the function of the words. For example, they were supposed to use the word "get on" instead of only using the word "on" to express the idea of going somewhere by car or public transportation.

Students' Involvement during the Speaking Class in Cycle 1

The data of the students' involvement were gained from the observation sheet, field notes, and the questionnaire.

- The result of observation sheets and field note in cycle 1 still achieved poor level.
- The above finding was also supported by the result of questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 7 statements and submitted on April 9th, 2011. The result showed that there

were only 67.7% students giving positive responses toward the implementation of Think-Pair-Square.

Revision of Cycle 1

- Based on some considerations, the researcher made some changes in the teaching procedures to be implemented in Cycle 2. First, he used flashcards to help the students to pronounce the words correctly and gave some questions for hints so that the students found the meaning of the words themselves.
- The scenario of teaching and learning process was changed in terms of grouping of the students in first meeting of the cycle.

The Students' Achievement in Cycle 2

- Clearly the result of Cycle 2 met the criteria of success. The number of students who achieved the minimum passing grade, 75, in Cycle 2 is 90.3%. It means that there was a significant improvement of students score after the implementation of Think-Pair-Square strategy in Cycle 2, 70.9
- The result of observation checklist and field notes showed that the students who were considered actively involved during the teaching and learning process achieved > 85%. It means that the second criteria of success had been achieved. Most of the students were enthusiastic in the speaking class using the Think-Pair-Square strategy.

The Teaching and Learning Procedure Using Think-Pair-Square Strategy

With the findings of this research, it is found that Think-Pair-Square strategy is very effective to teach speaking and gives significant contributions in improving the students' ability.

Dealing with the procedure used in teaching speaking using Think-Pair-

Square, the researcher made some modifications of the original procedure which was made by Kagan.

Think- Pair-Square refers to the three-step cooperative structure in which individuals think individually about answering a question posed during the first step. The modification was made in this wait-time or thinking phase considering the level of the students. According to Kagan in Lie (2002) the wait-time commonly lasts around 3-5 minutes. Considering the level of the students in this research, the researcher gave a longer wait-time to think about the topic around 15 minutes-20 minutes. The longer wait-time was decided based on the need analysis of the students since they are still the tenth graders.

The next step, individuals pair up and exchange thoughts. The students had the chance to tell their opinion/story being discussed with their pair. The researcher also gave time limitation for each student to share his/her ideas, which is 7 minutes at most. The last, the teacher gave assistance for the students who needed it. The teacher came to each pair to help the students when he/she lost words while presenting their ideas. This assistance was given to the presenter if his/her partner could not give any help anymore. Harmer (2007: 109) states that it can liven things up from the inside instead of always having to prom or organize from outside the group.

The last step, the pair shares their responses with other pairs, other teams, of the entire group of class. In this step, one pair shares their ideas with another pair which forms a square. In this step, the students were encouraged to ask at least one question for the speaker. It helped the students paid attention to the speaker while they were discussing.

As the closing, the teacher asked one or two students to share the result of their

discussion to the class. The teacher also gave opinions and suggestions for the students.

The Improvement of the Students' Speaking Ability

It is required a certain strategy to improve the EFL students' speaking ability which is appropriate with the students' need, interest, and level. The Think-Pair-Square is recommended as a strategy for teaching speaking which appropriate with the students' need, interest, and levels.

The result of the research employing the Think-Pair-Square strategy indicated that there was significant improvement of the students' speaking ability. It could be seen from the students' score which were evaluated using analytical scoring rubric adapted from O'malley and Pierce (1996: 67). At the preliminary study, there was only 22.5% of students got the minimum passing grade. It was gradually improved to 67.7% at the Cycle 1. There was a significant improvement (45.2%) of the students speaking score after the implementation of the Think-Pair-Square strategy. The improvement indicated that this strategy is very helpful for the students because it can show the individual accountability. Each individual had responsibility to take a part during the discussion because he/she has unique ideas worth to listen by other members. Another factor that helped the students to gain a better score of speaking was the wait-time phase. It gives every student in the class time to access prior knowledge (Teacher Vision, 2007). This phase helped the students to be ready to share their ideas with less hesitation. This positive interdependence made the students perform better.

After going through the second Cycle, the number of the students who got ≥ 75 increased from 67.7% to 90.3%. The increase of the students' speaking score indicated that students were getting better

in learning English. The principles that helped the students to perform better is the face-to-face interaction with their peers which led to the better social skill. They felt more comfortable to speak and share their ideas. It could be seen from their activities in the classroom during the implementation of the Think-Pair-Share strategy.

Since the number of students who got the minimum passing grade is 90.3%, it means that the second criteria of success have been reached which indicated that the research is already successful.

The Improvement of Students' Involvement during the Teaching and Learning Process

The result of the researcher's and observer's observation obtained during the implementation of the Think-Pair-Square strategy in two cycles showed that the students' involvement on the teaching and learning process improved from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2. The final result of the students' involvement was 91 % which is more than the criteria of success.

According to Richards and Rogers (2002: 87) cooperative learning seeks to do the following. First, raising the achievement of all students; including those who are academically handicapped. Second, helping the teachers builds positive relationship among the students. Third, giving the students experiences they need for healthy social, psychological, and cognitive development. Fourth, replacing the competitive organizational structure of most classrooms and schools with a team-based, high-performance organizational learning.

Conclusions

With the research findings, it can be concluded that Think-Pair-Square has been proved very good to improve the speaking ability of the tenth graders of *SMKN 1 Singosari Malang* in terms of content, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary. .

The steps of the implementation of Think-Pair-Square strategy include (1) doing brainstorming to have the students focus on about the topic that will be discussed, (2) telling the students what is going to be done to make sure that students understand well about the procedure, (3) having the students think 15-20 minutes about the topic individually, (4) having the students work in pair to exchange ideas, (5) having the students share the result of the discussion within the pair with another pair, (6) allowing the students to ask questions to the member of the pair while they are performing their discussion, and (7) asking one or two students to share the result of their discussion to the class and teacher also gives opinions and suggestions for the students.

Suggestions

On the basis of research findings and discussions, the following suggestions are offered to the teachers, institution, and the future researchers.

For the English teachers, the finding of the research can be a practical contribution to solve problems of unsatisfactory speaking ability of the students and on how to improve the students' speaking ability with more practice of using oral communication in their real and natural communication activities.

For the institution, the findings are expected to be useful for decision making that the teaching of speaking in this institution has to use the Think-Pair-Square as a strategy. The headmaster is expected to encourage the English teachers to implement the Think-Pair-Strategy, so they can help the students to improve their speaking ability.

For the future researchers, the findings of this research can become a good reference when they want to conduct similar research. There are some weaknesses of

the result of this research. First, the teacher did not provide enough assistance for the low achievers during the square session. Second, the teacher also did not give time limitation during the sharing session, so the students were confused when to stop. Third, the teacher did not organize the grouping carefully, so the low achievers were grouped with other low achievers. It is recommended that the future researchers avoid and minimize these weaknesses.

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