CULTURE STUDIES TECHNIQUE TO RAISE THE STUDENTS’ SPEAKING ABILITY

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Abstract: Speaking is one of the productive skills having its own difficulties. Students of Indonesia learn English as a foreign language and it is natural to find them not so comfortable. Most of them are shy to speak English and the main reason for it is the huge gap which they feel when they talk to students who have a reasonably good command over the English Language or listen to their peer group speaking fluently. The average and weak students should get lot of encouragement to build confidence. The confidence can be built if they can share what they really know. What do they know more than the others? The answer is their own culture. Here cultural studies is offered to the teachers teaching speaking class. Freeman & Freeman (1994) states that Culture studies is studies in which the students share information about their cultural history. The function is to give information about different culture that the students have. It is profitable for students to work in pairs or small groups so that they can compare and contrast cultural norms. By applying this strategy, students can raise their speaking skill and improve their knowledge about other cultures.

Keywords: culture studies, productive skill

There are four skills in English language that must be learnt; they are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is one of the productive skills which has its own difficulties. It is natural for teachers to find the students in speaking class not so comfortable because students of Indonesia learn English as a foreign language. Most of them are shy to speak English and the main reason for it is the huge gap which they feel when they talk to students who have a reasonably good command over the English Language or listen to their peer group speaking fluently. The background of the students in each class is different. Teachers sometimes find a class with almost all students having good ability in English. They sometimes find a class with most students having low ability in English. The reasons are various. It can be because of the parents’ economy condition; for example the students having high economy parents can get an English course out of school while the students with low economy cannot. It can also because the technique implemented by the teacher in the class before is monotonous. In the previous speaking class the teacher probably simply asks the students to memorize concept or conversation. The average and weak students feel nervous, afraid, and confused to express their feeling in speaking class. They stuck on the idea when the teacher asks them to speak up. Moreover if they are asked to talk about something unfamiliar with them, they will be more nervous.

The Classroom Teacher’s Role

For classroom teachers, before making good decision about instructional practices for English language learners, they must understand how students acquire English, including their background. Language acquisition is gradual, based on receiving and understanding messages, building a listening (receptive) vocabulary, and slowly attempting verbal production of the language in a highly supportive, nonstressful situation. The teacher is responsible for providing the understandable language (comprehensible input). The teacher should know the condition of the students in each class. In the class with good English ability, the teacher can speak fast with various and difficult vocabulary. However, in the class with low students, the teacher should select the vocabulary or even sometimes use gestures to make the students understand the messages. It is the responsibility of the teachers to provide a supportive classroom environment in which students can participate at a comfortable situation without worrying about being embarrassed or placed in a situation where they feel foolish. The teachers need to use approaches and materials that can add and contribute to learners’ acquisition and to the production of language.

The role of the classroom environment in supporting learners’ acquisition cannot be ignored. Students need many opportunities for language interaction. Therefore, a classroom where students work together to solve problems and produce projects supports their language development. It gives them reasons to communicate and support in refining their language production. It also provides students with realization that their verbal communication is not always understood by others. If students are left to simply listen and observe without the opportunity to communicate they remain in the preproductive stage. The communicative classroom activities
Teaching Speaking

Nunan (2003) proposes that teaching speaking is not only teaching how to produce the English speech sounds but also use word and sentence stress, intonation and selecting appropriate words and sentences according to proper situation. In teaching speaking, teachers should organize the learners’ thought in meaningful and logical sequence and use language as a means of expressing ideas. And finally teachers teach learners to use language confidently.

It can be concluded that it is challenging to teach speaking to reach the final goal, namely to use language to express ideas confidently. How can students speak confidently if they still feel uncomfortable with the classroom environment like the gap and unfamiliar topics. Teachers should consider carefully to give topic to make students motivated to speak confidently. The confidence can be built if they can share what they really know deeply. And what do they know more than the others? The answer is their own culture.

Culture Studies

Grossberg (2010) says that culture studies is an innovative teaching that investigates the ways in which culture creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, and social relation. In other words, it can be said that Cultural studies is devoted to understanding the processes through which societies and the diverse groups within them come to terms with history, community life, and the challenges of the future. In culture studies, ‘culture’ is understood very broadly, but with strong emphasis on local everyday life. The topics can be media, sport, fashion, music, etc. It means that students can tell their own culture or their everyday life in speaking class based on the topic given by the teacher. It means that the students are not forced to talk about someone else’s culture. Someone else’s culture can be as a reference but the students are not insisted to talk about it.

The advantage of using culture studies is that the students can express the ideas more easily because they know what they have to speak. More easily here does not mean that they directly speak fluently but at least they can get the idea to talk about because the topic is about what they experience every day. If they have got the idea, they are confident to speak. Having confidence is very important for students in speaking class. If the students are confident and they begin to talk, it means that the final goal for teachers to teach speaking, that is students use language confidently, is reached. To make the students talk a lot, the teacher can ask them to be in a group of three or four. Why should they be in groups? It is profitable to encourage students to work in groups so that they can begin to compare and contrast cultural norms. Groups are used to get the students to interact and share the information. Other reasons are because in a group they learn more about their friends’ cultures and they can also learn English more through their friends; for example while their friend is talking, they can learn vocabulary that they have not known before. Another advantage of being in groups is that the student’s mistake can be corrected by their friend that has better ability in English.

Besides using small groups, the teacher can also ask students to be in pairs. The technique applied is interview. Through interview, the students can dig deeper the information about their partner, and interview technique is suitable for the class with most students who are shy and nervous to speak. The shy and nervous students will be more comfortable if they face one person than facing more than one people. Their anxiety is reduced because they feel that their mistake is only seen by one person. To form pairs, teachers must be careful because if the teachers are not careful, the situation and the goal of teaching speaking is not reached; the situation that may happen is that a low ability student gets a partner who also has low ability and the student with good ability gets a partner who has the same ability. In this situation, the goal to make the students talk and use language confidently is not reached because the pairs of low ability students do not make progress since there is no one giving input. The worst thing is that they will only listen other pairs without doing anything or they may talk less because they do not have ideas to increase the topic or to make the topic more interesting. The best way to form pairs is mixing the students so the low students can get input from the better students and they can share each other. Before starting speaking the teacher should give explanation that it is sharing and they will help each other and encourage each other. It is done to anticipate the better students feel bored since they get low ability partner.

Culture studies can be completed with media like pictures, photographs, or slides to make the class more interesting and to add ideas. For example if the topic is about the marriage custom, the students can bring pictures or show slides about the couple who gets married wearing traditional costumes. The conversation will be more interesting and while looking at the pictures, the students can have many ideas to talk about comparing if they have conversation without media.
As students work in groups, the teacher has an opportunity to observe and document their language interactions. It can be used to assess students’ growth and progress. Cultural studies provide a way for teachers to build the classroom community while engaging their students in a deep social study. Students will also learn to appreciate different cultures through firsthand accounts of personal experiences. It is hoped that by applying this strategies, teachers can help students raise their speaking skill and improve their knowledge about other cultures from other areas.

Bibliography


Biodata

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