IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS USING CLT METHOD: A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract. This Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted based on an internship of teaching two English Enrichment classes, involving 25 students of Grade 7 in Sekolah Kallista to determine the effectiveness of Providing Sentence Starters and Incorporating Images activities as a part of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method. The research was organised through several procedures, such as designing, implementing, observing, analysing, and presenting. The instruments used were observation, pre-test, and post-test. The students in both classes were first observed and then involved in a series of pre-test, implementation, and post-test so that their improvements could be measured properly using a rubric that assessed their fluency, pronunciation and accent, vocabulary, grammar, content organisation and development, and the duration of their speech as the aspects of speaking skills. Results of the post-test showed that the scores of the students increased from their pre-test scores, proofing that the implementation was effective in supporting students' improving their speaking skills, as well as providing them with an enjoyable atmosphere in learning and allowing them to express creativity throughout the lesson.

Keywords: Improving Speaking Skills, Communicative Language Teaching, Providing Sentence Starters, Incorporating Images, Classroom Action Research

Introduction
Up to the final semester of the 20th century, there have been nine total approaches that have been broadly used to assist the language teaching process, namely Direct Approach, Reading Approach, Grammar-Translation Approach, Cognitive Approach, Audiolingualism (mainly U.S.), Situational Approach (mainly Brit.), Communicative Approach, Comprehension-Based Approach, and Affective-Humanistic Approach (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Amongst these, the Communicative Approach, or also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), is even known to be widely used by teachers and instructors in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it presents various types of techniques that are not considered as difficult nor complicated, but able to bridge teachers with students through good communication in the process of learning English. Celce-Murcia also mentioned that CLT as a method involves learners creativity and innovation while using purposeful and meaningful revelations in the target language. This approach does not only focus on improving communicative competency but also on developing all four language skills, which are: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Communicative activities, which are the main engine of CLT, contribute greatly during the language learning process (Littlewood, 1981). These activities are mainly designed to provide whole-task practices, improve learning motivation, allow natural learning, and create learning supportive contexts. Chen (2015) stated the results of a research that in a mixed English
conversation class where CLT was implemented improves positive learning attitudes from within the students as they were provided with a modified learning method involving role-playing, the use of their mother tongue to reduce anxiety, and visual aids such as videos and pictures to help them feel comfortable and confident in the CLT classroom. There are diverse numbers of communicative activities that allow learners to achieve both oral and written communicative language learning competencies, such as Surveys (provoking learners into participating in conversations and exchanging opinion about the topic materials or even other activity ideas), Information Gaps (getting learners to discuss, exchange, and combine information between them to make up whole complete information regarding the discussed topics), Providing Sentence Starters (helping learners to complete or make up their sentences by continuing the given sentence starters and following the format), Incorporating Images (enabling the learners to make up sentences for conversations, stories, or other passages easily by the guide of one or several images), etc (Jamaliah et al., 2017). The communicative activities discussed and implemented in this research are Providing Sentence Starters and Incorporating Images activities with the aim of helping students improve their speaking skills. Reflecting on the background; research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Does using the Sentence Starters and Incorporating Images techniques improve students speaking skills?
2. What improvements found in the student’ speaking skills after the implementation of the techniques?
3. How did the students consider the implementation of the techniques?

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical Background**

**Speaking Skills**

The speaking skill is considered the most crucial amongst other language skills as it is one of the most productive activities in daily life and is important in carrying out conversations. Students should learn the communicative models of English speaking skills such as vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, and communication in schools and universities. Speaking is also defined by Chaney (1998:13) in Kayi (2006) as "the method of advancing and sharing information by the use of both verbal and non-verbal signs of communication in various circumstances". Students will only be able to express their opinions well through good speaking skills.

**Improving English Speaking Skills of ESL Learners**

Both ESL and EFL students in their English language learning program are accustomed to using the mother tongue which they are familiar with since the young age they first learned a language. Even in the process of learning the target language (in this case, English), they are still often used to the characteristics of their first language and end up confused with the target language structures they should follow to achieve proficient English competencies. Acknowledging this issue, various techniques which also involve technologies were discovered through previous studies and could be applied in ESL learning contexts to provide circumstances for communicative learning using authentic materials, even though it has not been produced or designed for language learning (Yuksel, 2009). This statement is now well-known and a lot of researchers have found out numerous techniques in supporting English
language learning to be well accomplished in ESL countries, improving all four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

**Providing Sentence Starters**

This technique is designed to boost learners' sense and creativity regarding the discussed topic by simply providing sentence starters and giving opportunity for them to continue those "opening pieces" with their own words to make whole complete sentences. The steps are simple yet have high potential in stimulating learners' mind set to be able to quickly understand the discussed grammatical structures and respond to instructions given in learning activities.

E.g.: If I was given a bag full of money, _________________________.

In some cases, teachers could innovate this technique to not only give the learners starters but also provide them with frames in some parts of the sentence to even urge the creativity out from within them while getting to understand the grammatical forms as well.

E.g.: Within the next 5 years, _________________________, even though _________________________, _____ will _________________________.

Sentences frames and starters make it easier for the learners to understand how they should analyse a sentence and longer texts to be able to complete it in discussions or other learning activities, and is effective to be used as an action to prevent learners to grow the habit of analysing and building any content without using proper frames nor grammatical structures (Echevarria, 2016).

**Incorporating Images**

The steps that the teacher must take to succeed in carrying out this activity in English learning are showing one or more pictures and giving simple instructions such as building a sentence or constructing a short storyline from the picture in a relay. The thing that must be considered is that the teachers must first explain to the students that the sentences they will compile must contain the context of the material being discussed in the learning process.

E.g.: The teacher shows a picture of a mother and her child sitting on a small carpet in the middle of the park, complete with their picnic equipment. Then, a student is instructed to construct a sentence to tell the situation as seen in the picture. The next student will have to continue the storyline, and so on.

**Improving Speaking Skills through Providing Sentence Starters and Incorporating Images**

Combining these two activities to help students improve their ability to build sentences, paragraphs, or other types of long text including the implementation of communicative teaching methods, as well as the implementation of survey filling activities, Information Gaps, as mentioned by Echevarria (2016), Jamaliah et al. (2017), and other previous researchers. The main concept of the communicative approach in language teaching is developing a series of procedures to assist the teaching of all four language skills while conceding the interrelationship of communication and the language. Both "Providing Sentence Starters" and "Incorporating Images" activities promote this concept clearly and each step has also been proven to be simple for any teacher or instructor in ELT to follow in helping learners improve speaking skills, even when they had to do it for the first time. These two activities trigger creativity and a sense of building proper sentences into longer text form in spoken activities such as presentations, discussion, speech, etc.
Previous Studies
In 2015, Khan researched a type of communicative activity on non-native English learners to improve their communication skills, which is involving movies during the language learning process. The research mentioned that for a lot of ESL learners, movies appear as a media to connect them even closer to the culture of speaking English. Adopting movies enable learners to participate in a more authentic experience and discover variant features in spoken communication, like pronunciation, voice modulation, tone, accent, vocabularies, speech paces, etc., (Sherman, 2003; Webb, 2010). Forasmuch as there are so many different types of movies based on their different topics, issues, genres, and other aspects, teachers could freely make use of them and design discussion activities about certain events, area, history, era, or other cultural points to be involved in the learning process.

Another activity, 'Describe and Draw', was mentioned in a study done by Jamaliah et al. (2017). A student was given a picture and must not show it to his or her partner who then is required to re-draw the picture. This means that the first student must describe the picture and give instructions; the partner was allowed to ask questions as well. This activity highly motivates learners and provides an authentic chance for communication to take place because almost any language could be involved.

In a study done in the year 2018, Toro et al. cited Chen's (2015) research of studying the aftermath of implementing CLT in a class with mixed English conversation and its effect on students' learning attitudes of being active learners. Results indicated that the learners felt comfortable with the implementation of CLT in their class as it provides them with a modified learning method involving the use of their native language, media such as pictures and videos, and also role-playing in the class. The students became active learners who demonstrate positive learning attitudes.

Various other activities have been involved in the experiment to prove the effectiveness of the communicative approach in the English learning process, especially for ESL students. However, no research has discussed the involvement of the two activities mentioned in this study, namely 'Providing Sentence Starters and Incorporating Images', and it is based on this reason and the emergence of this gap that the authors took the opportunity to research and involve these two activities on the research subjects who have been appointed.

Research Methodology
Participants
The subjects involved in this Classroom Action Research (CAR) were 25 students who were in grade 7 at Sekolah Kallista, Batam-Indonesia, where the author carried out an internship by teaching two English Enrichment Classes. Students who were placed in the first class were the students who have better English skills than others who were placed in the other class. The two groups of students were separated based on the results of their proficiency testing on the regular midterm English class examinations, which could also conclude that the first meeting of these additional classes was after their midterm tests period ended. Each class had to attend the English Enrichment course one time per week under the instruction of the same teacher. What distinguishes both was, even though the topics of learning for each meeting in the two classes were the same, the materials that were presented were different, based on the classes they were divided into. Students in the first class were expected to be able to devour learning materials that
are a little more complicated than the other class of students, where the learning material they were part of had been adjusted to their respective abilities, although of course with the same goals in the learning process both classes. All of these students were involved in the learning process with the same goal of improving speaking skills, by applying the same two activities while learning, which are the activities of providing sentence starters and incorporating images, as previously mentioned.

**Instruments**

This research involved several instruments during the data collection period. Firstly, the students' speaking ability using English was observed through various activities carried out in class, for example when they answered questions, read texts, presented ideas, etc. Aspects learned when they practised their speaking skills in English were their ways of pronouncing each word spoken, the structuring of words into phrases or sentences, the ability to express ideas effectively, their gestures in delivering a speech, and so on. Then, they were involved in both pre and post-tests, examining their speaking skills before and after the application of the method through a similar activity in the two tests, namely by instructing them to present a particular topic according to their respective opinions. The students were first given a few minutes to prepare and then everyone was randomly called to present. Each student was evaluated using the same speaking assessment rubric in the pre and post-tests. Rubrics are usually used in speaking assessments to report an overall point on score points or bands scales, to present more consistent, reliable, and valid results of the assessment that shows the speaking level or achievements of the learners (Council of Europe, 2014). Ulker (2017) mentioned that this way of assessing improvement in learners' speaking skills is commonly used when a judgement is required to be performed immediately. Students' score from the pre and post-test retrieved using the rubrics were then compared and analysed whether there were improvements to their speaking skills after the application of the offered activities and method. The findings were also used to identify whether the offered activities of CLT is effective and can be widely used to help improve learners' speaking skills.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

During the research, there were five stages implemented. The first stage done was preparing the points of observation and the next stage was carrying out the pre-test using the designed rubric. After the first results were out, the next stage implemented was applying the offered activities of CLT in both classes. Another stage of post-stage was conducted to obtain the students' scores after the implementation and these scores were then assessed in the next stage. The last stages were the reporting of the findings and concluding.

Several procedures were taken in analysing the findings, such as the data categorisation, where scores from both pre and post-tests were taken, classified, and then interpreted according to whether the final scores improved or not from the first ones. Next, these findings were presented in more simplified forms (using tables) for a better view of comparison and from then taken to answer the research questions along with the presentation of the observation. The last step done was generalising, which was concluding all the findings obtained.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Observation**
Before implementing the pre-test, students in both classes were first observed to obtain more details regarding their speaking skills in the classroom. Their speaking abilities were considered through activities carried out in class, for example when they answered questions raised by teachers or other students in the class, when they discussed in groups, or when they took turns presenting their findings in previous discussions. Special attention was given to learning how they pronounced words, structured words into phrases or sentences, fluency, accent, focus, expressions and gestures of delivery, and other aspects that can be considered in assessing their speaking ability.

Students in the first class generally showed quite good performance on various occasions where they were required to demonstrate this speaking ability, but sometimes there were still some mistakes. For example, there were times when some students mispronounced certain words, several still had to be reminded in their ways of composing sentences, and some students lose focus in their conversation, ending up not being able to present a certain topic completely. The student group in the second class tended to have slightly less English proficiency than those who were in the first class, as previously mentioned. However, that does not mean that their language skills, especially their speaking skills, are totally bad. Every student in this class showed on various occasions that they could use English, however, some were not very fluent when instructed to answer or deliver presentations in English, and the number of errors was slightly higher than what has been performed in the first class. Several students took a long time to prepare their answers, especially when asked to do it directly (verbally). Some spoke fluently but were not aware that the arrangement of the sentences they were composing was often wrong. Some couldn't focus their conversation around a certain topic and in the end; the thing discussed was not the original topic.

The observation phase continues in paying attention to the daily development of students when they enter the pre-test period, the implementation of the techniques mentioned, to the post-test which is the last marker of their speaking ability development. During conducting the pre-test, the students still performed several mistakes as mentioned before. A few showed hesitations while finding the correct words to fit in their sentences. Some even requested to pass their turns to the next students to have more time in preparing their performances in the last order despite the class had already taken more preparation time than instructed in the beginning. Several students in the second class even lose their opportunities to perform because the scheduled class time had ended.

After the pre-test was applied, the activities of providing sentence starters and incorporating images were implemented in several meetings in both classes. In implementing the activity of providing sentence starters, students showed a positive response by following the learning path and participating in giving their answers. This activity provides a variety of sentence frameworks, the sequences of which can be very diverse, depending on the creativity of the students working on it. When they were first invited to try to continue the sentence frames, some students were still reluctant to immediately answer because there was the fear of giving the wrong answer. However, after being given examples, several students began delivering their version of the answers, and in the end, all the students in the class managed to build different sentences from the same frame. At the beginning of implementing the second activity, which is incorporating images, some students seemed to have difficulty building and delivering small stories from a predetermined theme, they were having trouble because they were asked to do it
suddenly, without preparation. The students were then shown a picture with a certain situation and given an example in making a small story based on the situation shown in the picture. To warm up, each student was allowed to continue the story by giving a sentence that continues the last sentence in the story. After completing one story, they were then faced with another picture and instructed to compose a new story. The students showed progress and were able to do the instructions given well, and the sentences they composed were also with the better arrangement (according to the correct grammatical structure). The second class of students did spend more time than the time students in the first class needed to understand completely ways of structuring good sentences and stories, as well as in their delivery. Both of these techniques were carried out orally in the classroom so that the development of the students' speaking skills could be seen clearly, and the teacher or examiner can interact freely to ensure students' progress continuity. During the implementation of these activities, the teacher actively pointed out and corrected the mistakes done by the students, such as errors in language structures, pronunciation, etc., so that they immediately understand and give better performance in speaking. Students were also allowed to correct each other's mistakes to boost sensitivity in implementing aspects of good speaking skills.

During the post-test, most of the students performed significant improvement, with their scores increasing in the various aspects of speaking skills. The aspects with the most increasing scores were the duration of their talks, lexical choices, pronunciation, and fluency. The total score achieved by students from the two classes is different because their English language skills were already different from the start, making the starting point for the development of their abilities are different as well. However, both groups of students managed to show significant progress and deserve to be considered as a success in implementing both the activity and the proposed method.

For the reasons of ensuring the positive response from students during the implementation of the techniques earlier, at the end of the meetings in both classes, the students were asked to once more express their opinion of the experience. The students mentioned being relaxed and enjoying the training of speaking skills regardless of the burden of having to improve their scores by the end of the post-test. Some mentioned that after receiving a quite low score on the pre-test, they felt rather down and afraid of not being able to improve their speaking skills in the required aspects. However as they were introduced to the ideas and techniques of composing sentence and stories in a simpler way through the activities, they could understand better and even pour creativity while doing it. These latest responses clarify the statement of applying the two activities or techniques of CLT supports the better experience of students in improving their speaking skills.

The Result of Pre-Test
In the pre-test stage, students on both classes were instructed to present a small talk where they had to discuss 4 topics, which are: (1) their favourite TV programmes or movies; (2) favourite entertainer(s)/actor(s); (3) favourite type of music; (4) favourite artist(s)/singer(s). They were all given a maximum of 5 minutes to present their talks and were called randomly (not according to their attendance list). To determine their speaking skills, the students were assessed using a rubric with several aspects to score, namely: (1) fluency, (2) pronunciation and accent, (3) vocabulary, (4) grammar, (5) content organisation and development, (6) duration. These aspects
were scored with the range of 1 to 5, with 1 being the minimum score and 5 for the maximum score. The result of the pre-test will be shown below:

**Table 1:** Class 1 and 2 Students' Pre-Test Average Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pronunciation and Accent</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Content Organisation and Development</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The total scores</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The averages scores</td>
<td><strong>35.83</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.33</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shown in the table above presents the average scores for students on both classes assessed using the rubric as mentioned before. The lowest scores for students on the first class were in the aspects of duration as they were presenting and also in their pronunciation and accent. The duration of their talks was only around 2-3 minutes, several managed to reach 4 minutes, and a smaller number of the students could only perform within 1 minute. The pronunciation and accent aspect cover their ability in pronouncing every word correctly, as well as performing good intonation, stressing, and accent in speaking. The range of scores achieved ranged from 3-4. Students on the second class achieved rather lower scores than the students in the other class, with the lowest scores on the aspects of fluency and duration as well. The fluency aspect deals with the way of their fluency or 'smoothness' in delivering their speech. Very few students were scored 4 in this aspect but mostly received the score of 2 or 3, due to the frequency of gaps performed while talking. It is not uncommon for them to stop talking to look for further words that match the things mentioned previously.

**The Result of Post-Test**

After carrying out the two activities in several meetings, student in both batches were instructed to attempt another small talk as a form of post-test, without different series of rules than the one they were introduced in the pre-test. They were expected to improve their previous scores by discussing another 4 topics, that are: (1) occupation(s) they admire the most; (2) the reasons; (3) advantages and disadvantages of the occupation; (4) people with the occupation that attracts them the most. Their speaking skills were assessed using an indifferent rubric used previously, and with the same score range as well. Results from the post-test will be displayed on the following table:

**Table 2:** Class 1 and 2 Students' Post-Test Average Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pronunciation and Accent</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total scores | 305 | 122
The averages scores | 50.83 | 20.33

Based on the post-test scores recorded in the table above, the students' speaking ability improved from what they had shown in the previous test. The highest increase in speaking scores experienced by students in the first class was in the duration of their speech. Almost every student has increased by at least 1 point in duration from their first test result. In addition, they also experienced a fairly high increase in the value of vocabulary selection as a result of the students' efforts to include various words in their small talk. Apart from these two aspects, the increase in grades was also clearly seen in other aspects, and in other words, the two activities succeeded in helping them in the process of improving the students' speaking ability in the first grade. The students who were in the second grade also experienced an increase in scores, which also suggests that their speaking ability improved afterwards the application of the two activities mentioned in their class. Although the range of scores obtained by the students in the two classes was quite different, it could be seen that the points for the duration of small talks of the students in the second class increased, as seen in the previous class. The score with the second-highest growth was on their fluency aspect, which was very different from when they were instructed to make the first performance. Stuttering and gaps were markedly decreased as they were better trained to develop speaking ideas through activities carried out in their class.

The Improvement Score Total

After the development of the value regarding each aspect between the two tests is described above, a table containing further explanations of the development of the students' speaking ability scores in both classes in an average form will be provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>CAR Implementation</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pre-Test Average</td>
<td>35.83</td>
<td>17.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Post-Test Average</td>
<td>50.83</td>
<td>20.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total Score Improvement</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the data score shown in the table above, it wouldn't be a problem to categorise the implementation of the two activities as well as the CLT method to have succeeded in achieving its goal, namely improving the speaking ability of students in both English Enrichment classes. However, it is necessary to consider continuing the learning process by carrying out these activities in the second class, where students need more assistance and time, hoping they would also succeed in catching up with other students' scores in developing their English speaking skills.
Conclusion

The objective of this research is to figure out the efficacy of implementing the techniques of Providing Sentence Starters and Incorporating Images as a form of CLT in an attempt of improving students' speaking skills in two English Enrichment classes. At the beginning of the research, a pre-test was implemented, revealing a clearer state of the aspects the students were lacking at on speaking skills through the use of a rubric assessing their fluency, pronunciation and accent, vocabulary, grammar, content organisation and development, as well as the duration of their talks. Students of the first class received an average score of 50.83 on the test, while the second class students received 20.33. While implementing the two activities, students in both classes exhibit a positive attitude and continuously showed improvements as a result of getting a better understanding of good speaking skills. Despite the rather slow movements, all students of the second class performed better as they participated throughout the activities along with the repeated error correction with the help of the teacher. The signs of progress were successfully maintained when the post-test applied as students of the first class improved the score of their speaking skills by 15.00 points, while the second class improved by 3.00 points, resulting in a total average score of 50.83 on the first class, and 20.33 on the second class. The students succeeded in improving their speaking abilities in all aspects of pronunciation and accent, vocabulary, fluency, grammar, content organisation and development, and speech duration which were assessed through the rubric. This statement answered the first and second research question that appeared in the earlier part of the research. To answer the third research question, students' responses were clarified. By the reasons of them admitting to enjoying their process of improving speaking skills, having minimum burdens, and allowed to pour their creativity throughout the activities, this states that they do consider the implementation to be supportive towards their speaking skills improvement. This also means that the techniques of CLT mentioned are worth to be applied during the learning process of ESL and EFL students.

REFERENCES


