

## **Improving Students' Speaking Ability and Willingness to Communicate through Joining English Debating Community**

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**Abstract**—This research was conducted to see how students' ability and desire in speaking could be improved by participating in the English debate community. This is done because many of the students have difficulty in speaking activities even though they already know various kinds of vocabulary and sentence structures. This research is a type of literature review research by reading and recording the thoughts of experts from various sources. From the results of this study, it was found that students' English-speaking skills improved in terms of fluency by regularly participating in the English debate community. This happens because by participating in the English debate activities students are forced to speak and think quickly in English and this makes them very accustomed to speaking.

**Keywords:** speaking, learning willingness, debate community

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Students' speaking ability has been becoming an issue in language learning nowadays. In most students in Indonesia, speaking often happened to be the least-mastered skill for the students. Students can write well but they cannot speak. In fact, many students feel reluctant to communicate in English even if they have been equipped by declarative knowledge about it. They know the vocabularies, the grammar, the pronunciation and other declarative knowledge of English but they are unwilling to speak it up. Even if they will, most of them cannot do it well. In line with that, Murcia and Seidlhofer (2002) agree that speaking has been considered as the most challenging skill compared to the others.

Drawing on that issue, this essay will talk about a solution to improve students' willingness to communicate and their speaking ability at the same time. Then, this essay will be supported by some literature as the reference. Here, the writer wants to present how students who join debating community are more willing to speak English and perform better as the result of regular practice they have.

As what English Department students commonly learned in their modules, English Department students in my university are also equipped by certain complex linguistics elements in order to support them mastering the target language. They learn phoneme, lexis, grammar, discourse and other related linguistics elements for three to five semesters respectively. At the end of the courses, they should also take exam to measure their understanding of that knowledge. Majority if the students could pass the exam well and got high mark on it. Unfortunately, what the great marks they achieve are not reflected on their speaking performance. The fact that most of the students are reluctant to speak English and prefer to use their mother tongue to communicate or remain silent. Moreover, they put too much anxiety on speaking, they are afraid of making mistakes, and finally they ended up silent. This phenomenon could easily be found in campus, café, library, and even classroom where students usually meet. The students seemed comfortable with that and left them no guilty for not practicing their English in the real use. Even if the lecturers have tried to encourage them to use English but they are still just to shy to do so.

Bayget (1987) identifies this problem as difference between knowledge about language and skill in using it. He admits that these two skills do not always go in line. An analogy has been made to illustrate these two entities by applying it to learning how to drive. Before driving, the driver needs to be familiar with the pedals, the controls and the way to operate it first. After knowing all of that elements, the driver needs to practice it on the road. The driver has to be focus that he/she would not hit any object along the road. The driver also needs control the car's speed and make sure

that he/she drives safely. In order to achieve the skills above, a driver need to practice it. If he/she just know the theory but never really drive it on the road, those skills would not be achieved. The same thing also happens on speaking. Even though the students got A on their linguistics modules, it will just stay on their academic transcript if they do not use that language. The students would not will and be able to speak English if they do not practice it. In fact, the students do not have enough exposure to practice their language in class so they need to have other platform to practice which is debating.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 How Debating Contributes to Students' Speaking Ability**

As what stated above, the speaking problems are derived from the different ability between knowledge about language (declarative knowledge) and skill about language (procedural knowledge). Practice and repetition can help the process of converting of declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge. It is expected that at the end, this will reach level of automatization where the language learners do not need to thing hard before saying something anymore. In addition, (Bialystock, 1990; McLaughlin, 1987) say that what has been learnt by the students can affect the communication in different ways. If it learned consciously, it can become automated as a result of regular practice.

In fact, within the practice, there is a process of repetition that will enable students to explore the language they have learned. Bayget as cited in Johnson (2005) says that repetition is not merely about linguistics elements, but it is also about context and situation. For example, when buying ticket in train station has becoming our routine every morning, we will get used to the scheme of that ticket buying. First, the costumer should tell his/her destination to the ticket seller, the ticket seller will let the costumer know the ticket's price, then the costumer pays it with cash or card. People who do this as a routine and already known this scheme well, any unwanted problems that may occur during the transaction would be handled easily.

Therefore, students can also experience the same meaningful repetition as the schema above through debating practice. According to Somjai and Jansem (2015), debating is a speaking situation where speakers from two opposite stands present and argue their arguments. Here, the students should make sure that they have decent argument to present and strong points to defend their arguments. Carter and McCharty (2015) say that in debating, students should deal with several exposures that may occur during the debate. Moreover, Krieger (2005) says that debate is a good activity that could stimulate students' cognitive and linguistics ability at the same time. Beside dealing with the language arrangement, the students also need to prepare the arguments and rebuttals they are going to deliver. Whereas, time pressure of this activity is really undeniable. They just have seven minutes and twenty seconds to deliver their arguments along with their rebuttals toward the opposition's arguments. Some students feel that seven minutes and twenty seconds is too long since they have to stand in front of classroom that makes them so nervous. Here is when practice can take a very big role for the students' progress. Debate is a speaking situation where debaters have to perform pro or cons arguments.

Within the speech, the debaters should be ready with any interruptions given by the opponents. In debating, the interruption is called by Points of Information (POI). The opponent teams will keep attacking the speaker's arguments by rising up their hands for many times until he/she get chance to speak. This may annoy the speaker and distract their concentration but has no control to stop since that is how the debating run. The debater cannot ignore this since the rule requires them to accept at least one so they can gain their speaker's point. This POI will be delivered in fifteen seconds only. I beg people can imagine how fast the opponent will speak and how hard the debater should struggle to catch the opponent's gist. At first, students get confused and have no clues about what they are going to answer because they might not ready with the questions. However, they should answer it unless the team will lose their points. In this part, students can learn of how to deal with time pressure and how to overcome any distractions within the speech.

According to (Levelt, 1989, cited in Scovel, 1998) there are three stages possessed by the speakers when they want to make utterances. They are conceptualization, formulation, articulation

and self-correction. Conceptualization is the first step when speakers have to monitoring the language, plan what to say and considering the utterances in the speaker's working memory. Formulation is the process of grammatical and phonetically encoding while articulation is the process of producing and saying it. Here, the speaker tries to find the correct language that can represent the idea that they have arranged on the conceptualism level before. Then, it comes to articulation level where the speakers transform what they have formulated into utterances. In this kind of debating practice, the students can also learn how to conceptualize, formulate and articulate their ideas among the debating practice. In other words, they need to arrange their answers toward the POI, find the proper language to say it and deliver it in a correct language. Then, the debater also needs to check whether the interlocutor understood what he/she is saying. Because students have less time to arrange their language, they often explore it while they are speaking. These processes supposed to requires much time to deal with but in debating they should try doing it quickly. The more they practice, the more they will come across those complex tasks.

The role of practice is really significant here. Bygate (1996) as cited in Johnson (2005) say that repetition task will enable students to produce better language because within the process they could familiarize themselves with the language systems, figure out the language problems, and deal with the time pressure that I explained above. At first, students who join this group feel that two-or three-minutes speaking was really hard for them. However, as the time goes by, they enjoy that seven minutes and twenty seconds speech a lot. The students become very brave to speak in front of people. Therefore, they can communicate very well. As suggested by Bygates (2005), practice take a really big role in improving students speaking ability. He explains that repetition plays a very significant role in speaking development. Through this debating platform, students have chance to conduct regular practice for twice to three times a week. This practice is always supervised by a tutor so at the end of the practice, the students will get feedback regarding to the content of the speech and language the use. The speaking improvement would not be seen instantly as it takes process. The students do not simply improve their speaking ability on their first and second practice. However, the progress took time. Lynch 2000; Maclean 2001 showed that students who practiced for their poster presentation, can slowly improve their lexical and grammatical accuracy. Moreover, practice helped them identifying the words, grammatical items and usage accurately.

Therefore, everyone can master the target language through certain condition. One of them by getting exposed to the language itself. This exposure which allows them to learn the language better is called by comprehensible input (i+1). Krashen (1984) as cited in Harmer (2004) tells that comprehensible input is the information the students already have plus the next level up. What students learned in classroom is considered as what they already have (i), while the debating community where they are being exposed to massive speaking practice is considered as the (+1). This is an effective way to let the students engage in more advance language practice that they do not get in class. They should have found it difficult at the beginning, but it improves along with the more practice they have. In order to do this, students have to familiarize their brain to work quickly and respond the opponent's idea while listening to them.

## **2.2 How Can Debating Improve Students' Willingness to Communicate**

There is communication apprehension commonly occur when students want to speak. This is what finally stop students from speaking and remain silent. It is an over-anxiety of making mistake on the language that cause most of the students are finally unwilling to speak. One of the reasons that causes students feel anxious to speak because their friends are sometimes make fun of their English. While in debating, the students meet other debaters that encourage each other to speak English. This conducive environment really supports them to experience better language environment.

Besides anxiety, confidence also becomes an issue that stop students from speaking. Like what (Dornyei, 1998) said, self-confidence will be lower if the speaker feels uncomfortable with the use of that language. They will be shy and reluctant to speak. Therefore, Harmer (2015) says that when students are asked to speak English, there will be feeling of desire and fear that occur at the same time. They want to speak but they are afraid of making mistake and look silly in front of other

people. However, as the practices going, the students will come into automatization where they can apply their declarative knowledge into practice well. Moreover, they do not need to take much time to speak anymore, become more confident to speak in front of public and gain critical thinking at the end of the course. Later on, it will be automatically affect their daily communication.

Moreover, McIntyre et al (1998) explains that people's willingness to communicate can be analysed by using a pyramid. Here, English debating could help students in some layers related to that pyramid. First, it develops students' intergroup attitudes. It is where the students have comfortable environment to talk and they would not be insulted when making mistakes. This atmosphere would encourage students to speak more. Therefore, in that debating community, the students are not going to be marked based on their grammar. Instead, they are going to be analysed based on their idea since it is believed that they will be aware of their mistakes when they get familiar with the language. It helps students to decrease their anxiety in speaking and later on it encourages them to be willing to speak in front of public.

Then, it also influences the intergroup motivation layer. In debating community, students are usually become really close to each other. It increases their sense of belonging to the community. Emotional trust is also developed in this debating community. They build trust and support each other to speak up their idea. This close emotional bonding has a really great impact on students' performance willingness to speak as they are surrounded by friends who always support them to do so. The support is really significantly affected students' willingness to communicate since they do not need to be worry of any friends who will make

### **3. RESULT**

Debating can be a very interesting activity to help students improving their speaking ability. One of them is for English department students who have been equipped by declarative knowledge about language but still find cannot and do not want to communicate in English. Some of them purely do not speak English outside because they cannot use it and the rest are not willing to use it. Moreover, debating helps students with these issues. The students will learn to diminish their anxiety and improve their self-confidence at the same time. Moreover, ambience that is offered by debating community in my university is really encouraging. Students speak English freely because they are not afraid of making mistake since none will make fun of their language. None of the students will let the other member down, they motivate each other to be brave to speak English. This is the situation that students unlikely to have outside the debating community. Apart from their linguistics improvement, this will also affect their psychological side that will encourage them to speak.

They may not talk about politics, economy, environment and any other related things in class with limited time given on the rule. At first, it will be hard for students to do it but later on the will do it faster because the environment automatizes them to do. They will just feel easier to convert that declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge in practice. By its concept of (i+1) it shown that what is given to the students is one level better than their current level. Here, students are forced to talk about something they should think a very short time. Then it becomes automatic since they are forced to this kind situation and at the end they will be accustomed by kind of formula. After that, students more get used to speaking and their ability will be above the average.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

There is a tough learning process that debate will propose students within the practice. It will help students to improve their automaticity in using the target language as they are exposed to the language use roughly. In the debate practice, the students have to deliver several ideas and prepare the response for that. Students conduct practice for twice or even three times a week. As they use that language quite often, so they get used to it. The more they repeat that language, the more fluent those students at the end. Here, in debate, students deal with that. They need to talk about politics, science, environment and other interesting topics that is commonly talked by people in real communication. Therefore, before debating, the students should read some articles first. It allows students to learn to transfer what they have previously read about speaking. Moreover, students who

join debating also perform better in any presentation in their class. Most of them get higher mark than their classmates who do not join it. In conclusion, debating really helps students to improve their speaking ability and willingness to communicate at the same time, not only outside the classroom but also on their academic performance at class.

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