Chapter 31

‘Soul Unveiled: An Exhibition’ – Developing Speaking Fluency through Collaborative Learning

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ABSTRACT
The ability to speak English fluently is one of the most important skills to enhance effective communication. However, in the current English Syllabus in Malaysia, speaking skill is not tested apart from the School Based Oral Assessment, which almost always resulted into students who can score their writing tests well but are not able to communicate effectively in English. Some of the reasons that influenced the lack of speaking skills among students are anxiety, inhibitions and the lack of opportunity to use the language. Hence, ‘Soul Unveiled: An Exhibition’ aims to lower students’ anxiety and inhibitions of using the language and also to give them the opportunities to speak. This project integrates collaborative learning and develops students’ creative and critical thinking skills which aligned the project with 21st century learning while at the same time motivate students to enhance their speaking skills. Students are required to learn about iconic buildings in Malaysia and recreate the building using cardboard boxes and put them up in an exhibition for the public, all the while students are required to only use English while preparing for the exhibition. 27 form four students from a fully-residential school in Kluang were selected to participate in this project and data was collected through three different instruments; pre-test and post-test, students’ reflections and researcher’s field notes. Data collected shows that students’ inhibitions and anxiety are lowered and at the same time their fluency is also improved which further shows that using a Collaborative Learning benefits English language learning especially speaking skills.

Key Words: Speaking, inhibitions and anxiety, speaking opportunity, fluency, Collaborative Learning.
1. INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety and inhibitions usually impede effective teaching and learning English. According to Leong and Seyedah (2017), “committing mistakes is a natural process of learning a language, it certainly causes potential threat to one’s ego.” This only shows that the process of teaching communicative English is often truncated by the existence of inhibitions and anxiety among students who are expected to use the language. In teaching the skills of Speaking, teachers often had to face the problems of having to motivate the students to use English in class. Since English is a Second Language in Malaysia, there is hardly enough context for the students to experience English in order for them to acquire the language effectively, or to even familiarise themselves with the language. According to Long (2017), “Linguistic experience play a stronger determining role in second language acquisition.” The question is how is a Second Language Teacher creates a ‘Linguistic Experience’ such as one suggested by Long in order for the students to acquire English?

What is more, with the existence of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), Malaysians are expected to be globally present by the year 2025. In order to achieve this, the second of the six students’ aspirations illustrated by the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) is for Malaysian Students to have Bilingual Proficiency. Since the National Language is Bahasa Malaysia, this puts English as the second language students in Malaysia is expected to be proficient in.

With the lack of meaningful, conducive environment to create an effective Linguistic experience, paired with the problems of inhibitions and anxiety of second language learners, the idea to achieve the high expectations laid out by the Malaysian Education Blueprint seemed to be quite problematic for English Teachers. This innovation project aims to solve these problems.

2. THE INNOVATION

In line with the concept of Collaborative Learning, the innovation is divided into three phases; the first phase is to give input to the students regarding the subject matter or the learning environment they are going to be in. The theme of the innovation is National Buildings of Malaysia. According to Malaysian Education Blueprint, the sixth students’ aspiration it has outlined is National Identity, hence, the choice of National Buildings as the theme seemed fitting to the requirement of the Blueprint. The second phase is when the discussion between the students commenced; students are required to create a replica of the buildings chosen for them while learning about the speciality of the buildings. The third phase is when the students had to hold an exhibition for the public where they showcased the replica they have built to other students, teachers and also visitors from outside. The purpose of these three phases are explained in the following table;
Phase 1: Know Your Buildings!  
Purpose: Provide input for the students to understand what is expected of them.

Phase 2: Let’s Build!  
Purpose: Students are expected to only speak in English during this process. They are forced to discuss in English and the complicated and intricate work that is expected from them is meant to distract them of their inhibitions and anxiety.

Phase 3: Exhibition  
Purpose: Students are expected to be the guide of the exhibition. This is to make sure that the confidence they gained during Phase 2 is manifested during phase 3.

Table 1: Purpose of Phases

Additionally, at the beginning of Phase 2, students are expected to sign an agreement form whereby they are contracted to speak only English in the working zone.

In creating the replica, students are required to only use recyclable materials, specifically unused boxes. This is also in line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint, the fourth students’ aspiration where they value of helping the environment would build the students’ ethics and spirituality.

3. MAIN RESULTS

This innovation primarily showed a significant improvement in students’ fluency and also their motivations. Results are discussed below according to two themes;

a. Students Improvement on Speech Fluency
b. Students’ Motivation in Speaking English

3.1. Students Improvement on Speech Fluency

The participants (all 27 of them) showed an increase in oral marks especially in fluency element of the instrument. The average score of the students increased from 25.56 in their pre-test to 27.74 in their post-test. The post-test is carried out during Phase 3 while the exhibition was opened to the public. The teacher observed the students’ performance while interacting with visitors who visited the exhibitions. The test is carried out according to the School-Based Oral Assessment Form that is carried out under the Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah Syllabus that is still currently used in the upper forms secondary school system.

The increase of the score could be illustrated in the graph below;
The bar graph illustrates that there is an increase of 5.18 in students oral scores which further proves that the innovation done for the students is indeed effective.

3.2. Students’ Motivation in Speaking English

The participants (92.59%) generally shows enhancement and improvements in their attitudes in speaking. At the beginning of Phase 2, based on observation, students were more engrossed in making fun of each other when they were speaking English in the English-Speaking Zone. Little to no discussion happened as soon as they put down their signature in the agreement form.

However, as soon as the participants realised that the date of the opening of the exhibition is getting closer, they started to use English regardless of their anxiety and inhibitions. This shows that once they became aware that they need to convey meaningful and important information between one another, they started to use the language even when they used broken English. In the course of one week as they were discussing with one another to prepare for the exhibition, the conversation in English in the English-Speaking Zone became more fluid and more automatic. They have ignored their own anxiety and they were more focused on getting their tasks done.

These events were evidenced by SP 03, “I continued to speak even when I know I was wrong with my grammar” and SP 11, “I don’t want the visitors to come and see my work unfinished.” SP 16 said that “I am more comfortable speaking English now more than ever,” and SP 21 said that “I even spoke English to the Canteen Staff.” This further
proves that this innovation forced students to learn the language and acquire the speaking skills as they practise it, in tandem with the spirit of Collaborative Learning; ‘Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves,’ (Gerlach, 1994). This shows that more hands-on learning with meaningful, stress-free atmosphere facilitate a better learning environment for Speaking skill in English Language Teaching.

It is also interesting to note that the participants were very comfortable during the exhibition; the observer found that the students are very comfortable in speaking and presenting and also answering questions given by teachers and friends both from their own school and also by the visiting schools.

CONCLUSION

In the spirit of creating a more global human capital, as had been outlined by the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025), it is important to note that Speaking is one of the most important skills which would enable an individual to be a global citizen, because English language speakers are more marketable in global companies, as had been stated by Leong and Seyedah (2017).

This innovation was successful in eliminating the obstacles faced by English Teachers in teaching and motivating students in speaking English. Teachers need to just create a meaningful and real situation and the environment in Speaking English, and students will be able to use the language in the end.

REFERENCE