

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN ACTIVATING STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATIONNur Fitri, S¹

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^{1,2}Universitas Negeri Makassar**Abstract**

This conceptual paper is aimed at describing the procedures of three active learning strategies which can be used to design a learning situation for learners to speak English actively. The three active learning strategies are live interviews, short conversations, and long talks. Specifically, the implementation of each strategy can give an impact on the learners' speaking performance in terms of accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. Each strategy promotes the learners' self-confidence and thinking skills. The implementation of each strategy considers four aspects, namely: the roles of the teacher, the classroom interaction, the material, and the learning process. Each strategy evokes variation in those aspects.

Keywords: Active learning strategies, Oral communication

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As a foreign language class, learning to speak English is one of the language skills practices for English learners. Many studies have shown that learners of English as a foreign language have struggled too hard to be confident and qualified in speaking English in the English language classroom. Phrase-building problems, pronouncing sounds, using relevant words, speaking smoothly, and delivering messages meaningfully are the most obstacles that learners face when they speak English (Saharuddin, 2002; Malik, 2003; Chou, 2004; Soba, 2005; Amin, 2006). Besides, the content of information and the learners' readiness to speak are other major problems that hinder the learners' speaking performance (Goga, 2004). It is without a question that solutions to these problems are in aching need particularly in the teaching and learning process.

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Initially, learners' preparation leads to how willing they want to speak. Many learners can speak flawlessly because they have prepared what they want to talk about. They are familiar with the topic talk and they have practiced frequently. Therefore, they feel confident to speak and this situation leads to their activeness to speak. However, other learners are timid and feel reluctant to speak, especially talking in front of their fellow learners. Even they have information to talk about but they still cannot express their thoughts and feelings well. If those learners never attempt to practice frequently, the factors affecting the learning situation are tenuous. They will end up killing their potentiality softly. One thing learner can try to build up their speaking ability is to attempt to speak and to proceed to speak actively without any pressure. They have to prepare and be ready to speak.

For the aforementioned situation, teachers have designed and offered interesting yet insightful materials, learning activities, and a conducive environment for learners to learn to speak as proven by Chou (2004) with socio-affective strategy, Goga (2004) with questioning technique, and Soba (2005) with guided dialogues. The studies have contributed to the promising results on applying diversity in teaching methodology for speaking classes. The studies evoke a similarity in facilitating the learners with the learning strategy or technique that encourages and engages the learners' active participation to speak. Specifically, the teaching strategy that serves learners' active participation and engagement in active learning. The strategy requires learners to do meaningful activities and think about what they are doing. When it incorporates the learning of speaking, learners have to conduct the activity as instructed and engage their minds to think about what they are saying and how to say it. In the activity, learners will do much of the learning process and thus, active participation will be occupied. In this situation, learners practice their speaking performance. During the learning process, learners practice their speaking comprehensibility to understand meanings that are transferred to and from their fellow learners. To understand the topic talk or the activity, they activate their mind and build their

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readiness to speak. To speak with their fellow learners or their teacher, they construct sentences, use words, and pronounce sounds of English. When speaking English frequently, they have much time to practice speaking smoothly with the proper rhythm and the smooth flow. Thus, active learning activities promote learners' speaking performance.

There are many activities or strategies which learners can use to activate their speaking performance. Three of them that will be discussed in this study are live interviews, short conversations, and long talks. The three activities serve as leading strategies to engage learners' active participation to speak. Concerning that, the study in this paper addresses the ways those three active learning strategies activate learners' speaking performance.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is one of the theories of learning and teaching which principally enhances learners' logical and conceptual growth. It typically bases its principle on how learners construct their own understandings and knowledge through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Primarily, learners learn by using what they know to construct new understanding. Their learning process is based on what they have harbored in their previous experiences and prior knowledge.

As cited in Confrey (1994), Becker & Varelas (1995), Boulter & Gilbert (1995), Von Glasersfeld (1995), Salomon & Perkins (1998), seven implications of constructivism for learning are illustrated as follows:

1. Knowledge is personally constructed from new experiences. Every learner has different and unique experiences. Those experiences can be acceptable or become alternatives in the learning process. The best fit is usually an adaptation of prior learning that links new experiences in a way that minimizes cognitive conflict.
2. Every learner has ideas before learning and these affect the way that they make sense of what they are being taught. Learners make connections between ideas on their knowledge schema and the existing ideas. Thus,

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teachers need to have a good knowledge of the subject and the other experiences of the learners.

3. Learning is not transmitted by linguistic communication but language is a tool to help learners construct knowledge. Language is used to channel learners' knowledge construction and prior experiences in the learning process.
4. Individual constructions should fit with the accepted views of communities of practice. Through reflection, discussion, or other negotiated situations, learners' views before their understanding of a particular topic can be accepted.
5. Theories about the world are provisional. The idea that is constructed in any theory can be followed by other theories at any second of time. Therefore, learners' understanding is an adaptive process.
6. Contexts are important in learning. Any contexts that support learners' view of learning will create participation structures that encourage increasing awareness of complexity.
7. Learning is a participatory process. Learners are seen as a social creature which, in all aspects of life, is connected and is involved in the territory of learning.

In the classroom, the constructivist view of learning can be implemented in several teaching practices. One of the teaching practices is applying an active learning strategy. With the constructivist view, learners are encouraged to be active to explore their understanding and experience toward the subject lesson by experimenting, collaborating, or discussing. To build ideas and experience the learning outcome, they harness what they have, such as their prior understanding and previous experiences to fit and link with the particular contexts of understanding. To enhance activeness, learners, most of the time, interact and collaborate with their fellow learners. Fellow learners and teachers are learning supporters whom they can discuss and practice together. Thus, the teacher's role in this particular strategy is to help learners gain their understanding by

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encouraging, directing, and guiding them to be constantly experts in what they have explored. The focus in the learning process is the learners. The teacher, then, facilitates them with feasible ways of learning for their possible learning outcome.

Active Learning Strategy

Active learning has received considerable attention over the past several years and has been popularized the 1990s. The core principle of the strategy is learners must do more than just listen, they must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. The process of learning encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Bloom (1956) thought that the process of active learning is the goal of the learning process. In particular, the process engages learners' higher-order thinking tasks, e.g. analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Bonwell & Elson (1991) highlight that active learning engages learners in two aspects—doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. In particular, learners have to participate in the activity and use their minds to think about how to solve or to understand the content of materials in the activity.

Teachers and learners can choose and apply various active learning strategies in their teaching and learning process. Specifically, three of the active learning strategies which can engage learners' active participation and understanding in the classroom will be illustrated as follows.

1. Live interview

The live interview is an effective way for a pair of learners to learn together. The strategy may last within a certain period of time depending on the difficulty level of the topic. At first, the topic of the interview is determined. After that, the teacher models how to have a live interview by being an interviewee. As an interviewee, a teacher will be interviewed by his learners, like they are having a press conference. In that position, learners are interviewers. After several minutes of the grand interview session, learners are paired. In pair activity, learners are interviewed one another in turn about the chosen topic. At the end of the pair activity, a teacher asks one per one learner (summon may be random) to

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come in front of the class and become an interviewee, who has to be ready to be asked by his fellow learners.

Implementing the strategy, a teacher has to manage the time of each activity. He has to make sure how much time his learners use to dig up information about the interview topic during grand interview sessions and pair activities. During the interview session, learners participate, interact, and communicate with the teacher and their fellow learners. Being involved in the interview session, learners' psychological state is spontaneous and their thinking process will be availed. They have to answer every question which is arisen. In that activity, the readiness to speak and to answer the question is popped up.

2. Short conversation

A short conversation is held by grouping learners into three to create their own conversation. It is a small dramatic session in which learners have to take part in the conversation. The topic of conversation will be chosen and learners will discuss the topic in their group. In the group activity, learners are instructed to create lines of conversation by dividing parts of the conversation with a maximum of three times turn-taking. After that, groups in turn will demonstrate their conversations in front of the class. After performing the conversation session, fellow learners propose questions or give comments and suggestions concerning the content of the conversation demonstrated by a chosen group. The session situates a big discussion with one performed group against other groups.

To apply the strategy, learners need to work on their creativity and imagination. At first, they need to understand the chosen topic so that they can create and build the story of their conversation. Then, they have to take a part in lines of the conversation. By performing the conversation in front of other fellow learners, learners' confidence is stimulated.

3. Long talk

Long talk strategy is an active way for learners to learn to take a position and gather information as much as possible to support their view in their individual presentation. In this strategy, learners individually handle one chosen

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topic and have to present it in front of the class. Preparation of the topic of presentation is highly necessary. At first, learners have to piece together every important point of presentation topic by defining, exemplifying, analyzing, and evaluating. They have to explain to teacher and fellow learners about the composition of their topic.

Primarily, learners have to prepare the sub-topic they are going to talk about and how it should be presented. Each learner is accountable to master their topic talk and to get their message across. The activities of long talk strategy conjure up learners' confidence and readiness to speak.

Speaking Performance

Performing speaking, one should deliver messages and make his audience understand what he is talking about. Specifically, for learners of English as a foreign language, speaking English is a double matter. Besides the mastery of the language use, they have to explore and understand the information of the topic talk. Accordingly, their correctness to speak the language and meaningfulness of their messages are the core jobs to do to have a good speaking performance. Heaton (1988) cites speaking accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility as the three categories of performing good speaking. The following illustration depicts the core points of the three categories.

1. Speaking accuracy

The term 'speaking accuracy' constitutes the correctness of using the components of language use in speaking. It lies on three components, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Simon and Schuster (1979) define each of the components as follows.

- a. Pronunciation is the act or manner of pronouncing words concerning the production of sounds, the placing of stress, intonation.
- b. Grammar deals with the forms and structure of words (morphology) and with their customary arrangement in phrases and sentences (syntax).
- c. Vocabulary is a list of words and sometimes, phrases, usually arranged in alphabetical order and defined; a dictionary; glossary, or lexicon.

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By reference to intelligible utterances, speaking accuracy promotes acceptable pronunciation, correct grammar, and appropriate vocabulary. Respectively, learners have to distinguish diverse sounds in English, construct various forms of English sentences, and use vast vocabulary based on context. Thus, the incorporation of these elements would fill the meaningful messages of the conversations which learners need to enhance their speaking performance.

2. Speaking fluency

Another point of performing good speaking is speaking smoothly without stumbling blocks. Very often, a speaker manages the way he speaks and that way flows in rigidity. His rhythm and speed of words are not in sync. Unnecessary pauses are unraveled. Hesitation to speak starts to augment. Accordingly, speaking becomes stiff.

However, the natural state of speaking fluency flows in smoothness. Simon and Schuster (1979) define fluency as speaking easily, smoothly, expressively, readiness, or smoothness of speech. Heaton (1988) extends the meaning of fluency as speaking with a fairly wide range of expression and without too much great effort in delivering expressions. It can be noted that the smoothness in speaking is delivering a wide range of words without fragmentary yet minor unnatural halting.

3. Speaking comprehensibility

The last to consider in performing good speaking is to speak meaningfully. Most of the time of communication, a speaker is faced with his listener or his opposite speaker. Whether he conveys meaningful utterances or not stimulates his listener's certain reactions. Heaton (1988) notes speaking comprehensibility is something to do with understanding the speaker's intention to speak. Only very few clarifications are made by the speaker or minor interruptions made by the listener.

In various speaking situations, learners of English as a foreign language will always be faced with practicing meanings of utterances. Hence, the

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introduction of various topics and positions in speaking will keep up the progress of learners' speaking comprehensibility.

The Aspects to be Considered

Implementing the activities in those three active learning strategies, without a doubt, can benefit the learners with stimulating speaking situations. However, the process is always embedded with the shortage. The following aspects create and build the situations that enhance and may decrease learners' speaking performance.

1. The role of teacher

A teacher is a chief person in the classroom who is in charge of leading the teaching and learning track. Applying the three learning strategies, a teacher plays roles as a manager, a facilitator, and a tutor. As a manager, the teacher designs and sets the learning situations. As a facilitator, he inspires and guides the learners in the learning process. As a tutor, he gives explanations for unclear points of the lesson.

Being those three roles, a teacher has the responsibility to engage learners to reach the learning goal. His duty is to make his learners be the center of the learning process. His learners are the only ones active in executing the learning process and he makes sure that the learning process runs well for them.

2. The classroom interaction

The active learning strategies have different activities. Automatically, the classroom interaction is varied as well. As for the live interview, the classroom interaction varies from teacher to student, student to student (dyad), to student to student. In a short conversation, the interaction starts from student to student (group) to students (group) to students (whole class). The interaction in long talk proceeds from student to student. The various interactions that occurred in the strategies aid the learners to get much input and to practice their speaking performance frequently.

When interacting in dyad activity, learners collaborate with their peers to complete the task given. Likewise, by interacting in a group activity, learners

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work with their peers to finish the assignment. Their participation and engagement to work on the learning task together with their peers enhance their confidence and increase their motivation. In the individual activity, learners have the sole responsibility to finish their task given. However, they are encouraged to perform well because they have to prepare their own material and present it in front of their fellow learners. It is worth noting that various interactions among learners will create and build a supportive atmosphere in their learning process and will enhance their speaking performance.

3. The material

The learning material used in the strategies is all about the chosen topic. The topic talk is the matter that learners discuss to elicit more information. A teacher can prepare the topic talks based on the competence level of learners. He can also let his learners find and choose their own topic talk. Initially, a teacher has to make sure that he understands his learners' needs so that he can propose and prepare more information about his learners' preferred topics. On the other hand, by letting his learners choose their topic talk, a teacher can brainstorm and explore information about the chosen topic.

Preferred of the topic talk, learners can easily dig up the gap of information to raise their critical and analytical thinking. They are familiar already with the backdrop of the topic talk and, during the implementation of the strategies, discussion of the topic talk can help sharpen their understanding. Thus, the learning material is assumed to stimulate learners to speak up first and, in the end, their thinking process of the topic talk will give them input to speak up more.

4. The learning process

The learning process is the implementation of the activities in the strategy. It refers to how the teacher sets the time, the material, the steps, and the atmosphere of the classroom. To execute the learning process well, a teacher has to make sure that his learners understand what they are going to do during the learning process. He has to explain clearly about learners' position, topic talk, and

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learning activities. He should check how much time his learners should take to do one activity. He also has to check whether his learners have understood the topic talk from one activity to another activity. He can offer his learners to ask questions for something unclear or he can grab one per one point of the discussion and explain it.

During the implementation of the strategy, he should watch and guide his learners on the steps they take to make them elicit information of topic talk easily, and speak up. He also needs to make sure that his learners can adapt and interact well with their peers. He has to create a supportive learning environment so that his learners will feel free of hesitation to undertake each activity.

2. CONCLUSION

The implementation of active learning strategies is one of the conducive and invigorating ways to suddenly make learners speak without hesitation and sharpen their understanding from the points of the lesson. Three active learning strategies are live interviews, short conversations, and long talks have various and different ways to prepare learners to speak up. Their disparity lies in classroom interactions and the learning process. However, learners can be encouraged to speak by the preference of the topic talk, the roles of the teacher, and the learning atmosphere during the implementation of each strategy.

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