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### **Making Students Speak a Foreign Language With Fluency Activity**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports an action research done in attempt to make students acquire speaking skill of a foreign language. It claims that the action research was a success at least in its first round. Problems pertaining to the lack of competency of students to speak in the Arabic language are often discussed but without a clear solution. This problem is addressed in the action research by engaging students in fluency activity. Altogether eight activities were carried out each of which with a duration of approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. The participants were from students from the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and 4 students from a nearby school in Bandar Baru Bangi. The fluency activity used in the speaking activities took into consideration other foreign language acquisition theories such as the Monitor Theory, language direction and common speaking experience. The outcome of the action research indicates that the experience the participants had was the main contributor to their ability to acquire speaking skill of a foreign language which is the Arabic language. This is due to the fact that although 5 years have passed since their first encounter with the fluency activity while participating in the research, they are still able to maintain their speaking ability with minimal effort. The implication of this research finding is undoubtedly significant at least from the action research perspective to find ways in making students speak in a foreign language. It could be considered a step forward for both researchers and teachers alike to enhance students' ability in speaking a foreign language. Having said that, the methods and the speaking activities used in the research should be further improved for a much promising result in the future.

*Keyword:* fluency activity, language acquisition, speaking skills, foreign language, Arabic language, action research

#### **Introduction**

Issue of students fail to acquire the Arabic language has long been discussed. But practical solutions that have been tested to be effective and could serve as guideline for teachers to realize the objectives in teaching speaking skills in Arabic language are seldom highlighted. Speaking skill is important as it is considered to be the reflection of second or foreign language acquisition and this is especially true for the Arabic language (Zawawi et. al, 2011). In Malaysia, the the level of communication skills among students is still a disappointment (Ab. Halim, 2009). This is due to the fact that students have been exposed to the Arabic language speaking skill for quite a significant number of years (Mastura & Kaseh, 2012), (Zarina & Taj Rijal, 2008). Apart from problems students face in this respect such as the lack of speaking vocabularies and others (Ashinida, 2003), approaches in teaching speaking skill should be given their due emphasis.

### **The Action Research**

In search for solutions regarding this issue, an action research was carried out addressing speaking skills in the Arabic language among students. The research was under the UKM research grant with the code UKM Kod (UKM-PTS-069-2010). This paper reports the first cycle of the action research with the hope that the second and the third cycle will follow in due course.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Background**

The participants who took part in the action research were students from the Faculty of Islamic Studies UKM and 4 students in year 5 from one of the primary schools in Bandar Baru Bangi. The activities were done once a week and with the duration of about one and a half hour for each meeting. Altogether 10 meetings were carried out and from these 8 could be considered as real actual speaking activities. This research was carried from January 2011 and ended in March the same year. Announcements and activities were recorded in the following website: <http://asdiqa-alarabiyya.blogspot.my/>.

#### **Research Implementation**

At the beginning of the research activity participants were briefed about the speaking activity that they would be doing. This was done using the mother tongue which the Malay language by taking into consideration one of the hypothesis in the Monitor Theory that states that there is difference between acquisition of a language and learning a language (Kreshen, 2014). Since this is the introduction of a language class and what should be done, it was appropriate that the participants understand clearly what were expected from them.

The speaking activity was concentrated around 9 question and answer session as follows:

- i. Place of birth
- ii. Previous school
- iii. What the student did the day before
- iv. What the student is doing now
- v. Favorite food
- vi. Best friend's hobby
- vii. What the student is going to do afterward
- viii. The student's ambition in the future
- ix. The student's telephone number

The reason for choosing these points in the conversation practice is that these question can be further divided into 4 categories as follows:

- i. The first category is speaking about the past in items number 1 to 3
- ii. The second category is speaking about the present in items number 4 to 6
- iii. The third category is speaking about the future and this is in items number 7 and 8, and lastly
- iv. The fourth category is about numbers in item number 9.

This is also because speaking is in essence talking about the past, the present and future according to the researchers view during the action research. And the questions and answers cover these aspects.

The participants were required to practice until they were able to pose these questions to their partners and answer the questions when asked. Initially they were required to memorize the 9 questions and answers in the Malay language and perform the conversation with their partners also in the Malay language. Only after they had experience the conversation then

they were guided and supervised to carry out the conversation in the Arabic language. This is in line with what was suggested as language direction as an approach in language learning which states that it is unlikely that a person will be able to speak in a second or foreign language if he or she is unable to say it in the mother tongue (Ismail, Z, 2014). In addition to the above, this approach was to give a general idea for the participants about the activity that they would be engaging in and that the speaking activity was not difficult and could in fact be accomplished. This too could be seen as variation of the fluency activity which emphasis that the activity should be easy and familiar to the students (Profesorbaker's Worldwide English Blog, 2015).

The Arabic language used in the activity was what is termed as the academic Arabic language. One of its characteristics is it ignore where possible the case ending of every spoken words. This is with the aim that participants would focus on conveying meaning rather than thinking of grammatical aspects of the words or sentences in terms of their grammatical functions. This is in line with they fluency activity approach that message and meaning should be the main focus in language activity (Profesorbaker's Worldwide English Blog, 2015).

During the implementation of the activity the participants were grouped in four. The conversation based on the 9 questions and answers were repeated among the group members. A participant would start practicing the conversation with the one beside him or her. Upon completing a round of conversation he or she would repeat the same conversation with the person in front of him. After that the participant would embark with the same conversation with the third participant who was the partner of the one in front of him. By doing this each participant would have perform the conversation on the same topic with 3 different participants in the group. This technique reflects what is termed as the need for quantity during language drills, based on the fluency activity approach (Profesorbaker's Worldwide English Blog, 2015).

Among the activities carried out in the action research was the participants were asked to perform the answering the 9 questions in the fastest possible time. The time for a participant took to complete the 9 answers was recorded and at the end of each activity the fastest time was announced. This caused the participants to practice harder in order to be the fastest speaking participant during a particular. The repetition process in such speaking activity contributed to the students speaking acquisition. This is clearly reflected during a normal conversation practice where they portray the ability to speak naturally and more spontaneously. This is the effect of what mentioned as a component of fluency activity where pressure to go faster is emphasized (Profesorbaker's Worldwide English Blog, 2015).

What can be observed here among others is during the speaking activities the class environment seemed to give common speaking experience to the participants which in turn helped them advance in their speaking ability. It was clear through observation that they were not shy nor hesitate in speaking among themselves. The speaking environment served as an alternative to real authentic speaking environment which facilitated acquisition the speaking skills (Ismail, Z, 2014).

### **The Action Research Outcome**

The participation of the students in the speaking activities during the action research was very encouraging and promising. Having said that, what is more encouraging is that after 5 years passed from the action research, there is a student who still manage to maintain the Arabic language speaking skills acquired then. This needs to be looked at in the context that the Arabic language is a foreign language in Malaysia where it is safe to say that nobody speaks in Arabic in everyday life. What follows are some details of the student:

- i. She participated in the action research when she was 11 years of age. Now she is 16 years old and will be in form 5 secondary school next year - 2016.
- ii. She studies in a normal secondary school where the Arabic language is not taught and thus she was and is not in any Arabic environment.
- iii. The speaking activity she did since the last time she participated in the action research was confined in her home with his father. It is not a continuous speaking activity and is carried out in a frequency of about 2 to 3 times monthly and of a duration of about 5 minutes in each activity.

### Some Discussion of the Research Outcome

The outcome of the action research does proof that fluency activity has the very potential to cultivate speaking skills among students. It is seen that despite the unconducive speaking environment and a rather minimal amount of frequency in the speaking activity the ability of the subject to maintain her speaking skill is not something could be ignored. This does imply that if the speaking activities were to be expanded and done in a variety of background and situation, a much better and promising result could be achieved.

Through observation and scrutiny of the language activity in the action research which clearly contributed to participants' ability to sustain speaking skills, it is found that these activities comply with that proposed by fluency activity as summarized below (Nation, I.S.P. 2014):

Action Research Activity	Fluency Activity
speaking about oneself through the 9 questions and answers	easy familiar material
the usage of the Arabic academic language	focus on receiving or communicating messages
group conversational activity with other participating friends	involve a large quantity of practice
the recording of the fastest time possible to complete the speaking activity with the 9 questions and answers	pressure to go at a faster speed

### Conclusion

The action research which was done with the application of fluency activity principles and other language acquisition approaches such as language direction, common speaking experience and the usage of the Arabic academic language shows that speaking skill in the Arabic language among students is not something far fetched. The research outcome could be considered an early proof that the Arabic language in Malaysia – and this is also true with other foreign languages – in terms of speaking, does have a promising future if the approach is further developed and implemented.

The application of fluency activity should be taken into consideration by those responsible in designing foreign language syllabus if they are serious in making students acquire speaking skills particularly the Arabic language. The language direction concept which has its own effect in contributing to speaking acquisition, should also be taken into consideration to realize the objectives of teaching speaking skills to students. The common speaking experience has its own unique contribution in order to enhance students speaking ability.

Having witnessed what fluency activity did during the action research in facilitating students speaking skills in the Arabic language, its implementation nevertheless needs to be

further developed and perfected. Further research must be undertaken and results and experiences must be shared among those directly involved in this field, so that teachers and researchers in language skills in the Arabic language will have a proven technique they can rely on to attain the learning and teaching objectives of a foreign language.

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