Recognizing the concepts of problem-solving strategy and its advantages in teaching speaking

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Abstract

The use of appropriate strategy in teaching speaking is always becoming an expected thing by the teacher because this strategy can help him bring the students toward the success of the teaching. Problem- solving strategy is known as one of the best one in teaching speaking. By knowing and understanding the concepts of problem- solving, the teacher feels helped to develop this strategy into activities supporting the improvement of students' speaking ability. Selecting the appropriate situations of the problem- solving will motivate the students to speak and find the solution of the problem discussed.

Key word:the concepts of problem- solving strategy, its advantages in teaching speaking

Introduction

The teaching of speaking relies more on the use, not the usage. Selecting the topics or materials discussed in teaching speaking also determines the success of teaching speaking in which the learners will be actively involved in social interaction and social expectation that refer to problem solving. Of course, negotiation of meaning will happen in a form of communicative acts between speakers and interlocutors in communicating their ideas to solve the discussed problems. The existence of problem solving in teaching speaking is necessarily viewed as a consideration for the speaking teachers to provide the topics or materials which stimulate more the students to speak in expressing the ideas.

Lynch and Andersonin Orlich[1]clarify that problem solving will help achieve the goal of teaching speaking that improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. Moreover, Students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language of problem discussed. In brief, teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This way frequently occurs when students are grouped or collaborated in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task for problem solving.

Based on the writer's observation and teaching experience, the hesitation of most of the teachers on problem solving strategy implemented in teaching speaking is because they do not understand about the concept and the advantages of the strategy, so that they tend not to use it in their teaching speaking.

Therefore, this paper tries to recognize and inform the readers the concept of problem solving as an effective strategy and its advantages in teaching speaking.

Recognizing the concepts of problem solving strategy

The nature of problem solving processes and methods has been studied by psychologists over the past hundred years. Methods of studying problem solving include introspection, behaviorism, simulation, and experiment. Social psychologists have recently studied the independent and

[1]Orlich, C. D, et al. *Teaching Strategies: A Guide to Better Instruction 2nd*. (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1985) ,p. 301

interdependent problem-solving that involve all aspects of learning including for language. The interest of linguists using problem solving for language learning is encouraged with the goal that must be achieved in learning language itself called as the term of communicative competence. Hymesin Nunan[2]cites, communicative competence includes linguistic competence, also includes a range of other sociolinguistics and conversational skills that enable the speaker to know how to say what to whom, when. Meanwhile Savignon[3]supports that communicative competence is the ability to function in a truly communication setting in dynamic exchange that adjusts the total informational input from one or more interlocutors. In other side, the existence of problem solving strategy really supports the goal of language learning that it optimizes the students' ability to perform their ability to interact one another in solving the problems through the concept of experiences. Richard, J et al[4] state that problem- solving is a strategy which involves selecting from several alternatives in order to reach the desired goal.

According to Orlich et al[5], the framework of problem solving is the concept of experience that the efforts the students attempt to solve the problem will produce certain desirable traits (or behavior) in those individual, so that they will be better to function the experiences that will articulate the content and the process of knowing. Both knowing what is

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[2]Nunan, D. *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1996), p.226

[3]Savignon, Sandra J. *Communicative Competence: Theiry and Classroom Practice*. (Menlo Prak, California: Addison-Weasley Publishing Company, 1983), p. 50

[4]Richard J, et al. Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992), p.290

[5]Orlich et al. *Op. Cit*, p. 279

known and knowing how to know are the important objectives for the learners.

The students working in problem- solving strategy will feel free to express not only experiences but also feeling and emotion playing a crucial and central role in process of learning. Durrant, M[6]communicates that the expression of feeling and emotion in problem solving is clearly a natural human response and often an important one, particularly at crucial moments of joy, excitement, fear, etc as the main mechanism of change. The joy of problem solving is solving problems. The misery of problem solving is failing to solve problems. Students who experience the joy of solving problems want to solve more problems. Students who experience only the misery of failure do not even want to try to solve any more problems. To be good problem solvers, students must actually believe that they can solve problems.

The students' conviction on their ability to solve the problem will bear spirit to bravely communicate their solution on the problems faced. Absolutely, it is supported with the situation where the students are really encouraged to do. It means the situations really give them opportunity to what they want to express through their ideas into a problem- solving. High appreciation and motivation seem as important things that should be possessed by the educators to guide the students more involved in the problem- solving its self.

The choice of a problem solving strategy has become the first step and help for the students to be the problem solvers in solving problem. They are automatically trained to respond and conduct the problems with good treatment. Of course,

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[6]Durrant, M. *Creative Strategies for School Problems*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1995), p.53

their efforts and interaction among them depict a successful learning process, really expected by each educator in every moment of teaching and learning process. In this moment, the students are able to show their ability to dig and look for more a solution of problem performed through a togetherness and solid interaction. The opportunity given for problem solving becomes them more confident and wiser to accept and respect the differences of ideas communicated as long as the process is really controlled and guided by a wise teacher or educator, so that they will be good problem solvers, never give up; they try a different strategy, different steps, and then they look for and look for more.

Meanwhile, Mc. Quade[7]clarifies more that the term problem-solving refers to the mental process that people go through to discover, analyze and solve problems. This involves all of the steps in the problem process, including the discovery of the problem, the decision to tackle the issue, understanding the problem, researching the available options and taking actions to achieve your goals. This statement is also supported by Cherry[8]Problem-solving is a mental process that involves discovering, analyzing and solving problems.

The ultimate goal of problem-solving is to overcome obstacles and find a solution that best resolves the issue. Before problem-solving can occur, it is important to understand the exact nature of the problem itself. If the understanding of the issue is faulty, the attempts to resolve it will also be incorrect or flawed.

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[7]Mc Quade. F. 2012. "Problem Solving Strategy". (Retrieved: 20 June 2012), http://pred.boun.edu.tr/pr/index.htm, p.1

[8]Cheery, K. 2012. "Problem-Solving Strategies and Obstacles". (Retrieved: 20 June 2012), http://psychology/.about.com/bio/kendra-cherry-17268.htm, p.1

Knowing and understanding the root of issue will always be the most important part of problem solving. The ability to analyze the problem becomes strength for the problem solvers to do. They may analyze a problem connected with what experience they once had or their prior knowledge based on the resources that they were involved in such as reading, watching, listening or etc. Arranging the steps in solving problem is also determining the success of this strategy because without appropriate accounting, the result expected is unsatisfied.

As informed in introduction, the success of problem- solving is also in separated with the role of teacher. When using problem- solving with students, the teacher must play the great clarifier to help the students define precisely what is being studied or solved. In this case, the students need continual monitoring by the teacher that means Students in problem- solving strategy are not simply allowed to follow their whims without controlling from the teacher. Orlich et al[9] add that problem- solving demands the teacher to continually receive progress reports from those students engaged in the investigative process and requires the building of close relationships between students and teacher.

Teacher must know the purpose of methodology of problem-solving that focuses on the systematic investigation of students' problems in which the students set the problem, clarify the problem, propose ways of obtaining the needed information or data to help resolve the problem and then test and evaluate the conclusion. In short, the use of this strategy, like any inquiry one requires careful planning and systematic skill- building. This statement is also supported by

[9]Orlich et al. *Op.Cit*. p.290

eHowEducation[10]the four basic steps for problems solving include defining the problem, generating alternatives, evaluating and selecting alternatives and implementing solutions. Using this as a pattern for approaching problems can help teach your students how to go about the process of problem solving regardless whether the solution ultimately works.

Wikipedia defines that Problem solving is a mental process which is the concluding part of the larger problem process that includes problem finding and problem shaping where problem is defined as a state of desire for the reaching of a definite *goal* from a present condition that either is not directly moving toward the goal, is far from it or needs more complex logic for finding a missing description of conditions or steps toward the goal. Considered the most complex of all intellectual functions, problem solving has been defined as a higher-order cognitive process that requires the modulation and control of more routine or fundamental skills.Problem solving has two major domains: mathematical problem solving and personal problem solving where, in the second, some difficulty or barrier is encountered.Further problem solving occurs when moving from a given state to a desired goal state is needed for either living organisms or an artificial intelligencesystem.

The advantages of problem- solving in teaching speaking

[10]eHow Education. 2012. "Problem Solving Skills in Teaching". (Retrieved: 20 June 2012), http://www.ehow.com/info_7977907_problem-solving-skills-teaching.html#ixzz1yl3OHk1, p.1

Bourke[11] provides several arguments supporting problem solving in teaching speaking:

1. Problem-solving exploits the learners' natural tendency to work things out. Studies in child language acquisition demonstrate that in language learning one cannot proceed very far without attempting to form hypotheses.
2. Problem-solving promotes what is known in the educational literature as significant learning, i.e. learning which is both self-discovered and meaningful. It enables learners to discover knowledge, internalize it, and subsequently reproduce it.
3. Problem-solving is an enjoyable activity when success can be achieved. It is a well established fact that learners learn like wildfire when they are interested and actively engaged in the learning process.

The use of problem solving activities in teaching speaking gives positive impact for the students' speaking ability improvement in which the students will have a discussion that gives them a chance to rehearse and take part in expressing their ideas on the problem discussed. They also feel that they are trying to use all of their any language they know, particularly obtaining feedback from the other students and the teacher. Harmer[12] (1998: 88) strengthens that the use of problem solving activities can give the students confidence

[11]Bourke, J. 2012. "Praise of Linguistic Problem Solving". (Retrieved: 6 June 2012), http://rel.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/27/2/12, p.1

[12]Harmer, J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983), p. 88

and satisfaction, and with sensitive teacher's guidance can encourage them into further study. Furthermore, the activities can and should be highly motivating that make all students participate fully- and can give sympathetic and useful feedback.

In practice, the teacher will inform the students kinds of the problems, possibly with the pictures. The teacher then asks the students to communicate what ideas or solution they have on the problems after they get from the teacher. This activity is really expected to produce an enjoyable great deal of discussion and interaction. With the right kind of students' involvement and teacher's encouragement, the problem-solving activities are highly productive and extremely enjoyable for both students and teacher. According to Richards, J et al[13], problem- solving activities are the learning activities in which the students are given situations and problems and must work out a solution. These activities are required higher- order thinking and offer feedback while the students are trying to solve the problem.

During problem- solving activities, the verbal and informational contexts are developed into ideas to achieve an expected solution done by students and even teacher's involvement. The process of discussion will be colored with the knowledge of each problem solver after analyzing the problem discussed.

GCSC[14]explains the steps in helping Students in the Problem Solving Process as follows:

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[13]Richard, et al, *Op. Cit*, p.290

[14]GCSC. 2003. "Teaching and Learning Through Problem Solving". (Retrieved: 6 June 2012), http://globalcrisis.info/teachproblemsolving.html#top, p.1

1. Provide the basis for the solving of the problem. List the possible presumptions to be overcome in solving the problem. Identify tools & references needed to help in arriving at a solution. Give basic knowledge needed to begin searching for solutions. Support off-the-wall suggestions which may have some validity or mayBreakdown the problem into manageable component parts.

2. Discover the interest of the students. Many students are not interested in a particular subject. It is the teacher's challenge to illuminate the connection between the topic to be taught and the students' interests.

3. Enter the world of the student. See the material to be learned from the student's viewpoint of what the student wants to do, know, experience.

4. Allow the student to create a project of personal interest which uses the material to be learned.

5. Multi-explanations or solutions. There is always more than one explanation for a phenomenon (some have been proven false long ago but were held to be true by the best minds of each preceding age). Alternatively, there is more than one way to interpret what we know, or more than one way to derive a solution. The differences should be brought up and discussed and the students given the task of defending different positions or of deriving the solution from different angles. Today there are many controversies still raging about certain phenomenon. What are they in your particular field?

6. Learning can be fun. This is a caveat of learning in childhood. Remember some of the ways in which children are taught from a unique and innovative perspective so that learning is actually enjoyable to the child. Translate these to

the subject at hand. It is never too late to enjoy the experience of learning no matter how complicated the subject to be taught. We can learn from the simple methods used in the earlier years of childhood. Take a list of teaching techniques from the early years. Look at them from the perspective of the current topic. Which one fits or with a bit of imagination and innovation can be translated or upgraded to fit the current circumstances? It is often surprising the degree to which that which helped us learn the simpler lessons in life are still effective in later years.

7. We know that many subjects can be learned by rote. The only problem with this method is the incredible boredom of the task and the fact that once learned we have trouble expanding the knowledge to fit new situations. We know the material without knowing the reason for its existence or truthfulness. We do not know the supportive knowledge which helped our predecessors find the solution. There is no fun in learning by rote except the high percentage on our exam grades, or in the presentation before others. But there is little or no expansion of true knowledge.

8. Interrelationships - It is important that the student, whatever the project is that has been chosen, make an effort to interrelate the subject of the project with the other topics of the subject matter. This should be more than a simple descriptive relationship and should include ways of integrating the selected topic with the other knowledge learned in the class. Having an individual represent a historical figure in a debate on some topic may help learn everything about one person but all others presented in the class may be a blank for the student at the end of the semester.

9. Work towards the strengths of each student. It is important that each student realizes and understands the

different capabilities brought by different students to a project. No capability or interest should be devalued. In a certain situation, each capability will help solve a specific problem. Collective problem solving should be emphasized over individual problem solving capabilities. Some students cannot see alternative solutions or any solution at all. When confronted with a potential solution, the student may be able to contribute knowledge from other areas thus increasing interest and adding to the solution of the problem.

10. Support the discovery of what does not work. This discovery is often as important as the discovery of what does work. The student can then be led to appreciate the lessons learned in the process.

In other side, Harmer[15]asserts that problem solving activity is one of the oral communicative activities like consensus activities in which students are faced with a problem to which there is a solution. This problem- solving activity has been successful in promoting free and spontaneous use of natural speaking through ideas on the discussed problem. In this activity, the students are told the problem and they are suggested to solve the problem.

In teaching speaking through problem- solving activities, teacher should be sure that students really want to speak something on their ideas for solution of the problem. In any problem- solving strategy, teacher behaves as stimulator that a new idea communicated will provoke the students' interest to speak. In other words, the discussed topics are to get the students to deliver their ideas, moving on their oral communication. It is possible for the teacher to integrate the problem with other forms of the study to convince and

[15]Harmer, J. *Op.Cit*. p.117

stimulate the students to respond the problem based on their best analysis. Direct correction of sentence order, mispronunciation, grammatical errors, etc while the students are speaking is avoided in order to build the students' self-confidence in expressing their ideas. They feel reluctant, inhibited, and even unconfident to speak when being disturbed or stopped suddenly due to the slight problem of error. Remembering the ideas spoken out by the students in problem- solving refers natural communication, and then direct correction is not really required. Zainil[16] (2008: 43) clarifies that during the process of natural communication, the meaning or understanding is primary, therefore, direct correction is not necessary. This process develops the students' communicative competence when their input is comprehensible.

The emphasis of use not usage in students' speaking of problem- solving activities is, of course, becoming a main priority. When the students' speaking of English is natural, their performance is already developed. Consequently, the speaking teachers must speak, teach, and communicate English naturally and fluently. As informed at previous statement, during natural communication process, the meaning or understanding is primary. It means that the use is priority to develop the students' comprehension on messages or information communicated in solving problem. The use is natural verbal that must be understood by the teacher in guiding the students in teaching speaking. Absolutely, understanding this way will be helpful to develop the students' acquisition. The acquisition meant here is the students' mastery of the language.

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[16]Zainil. *Actional and Functional Model (AFM)*. (Padang: Sukabina Offset, 2008), p. 43.

The most successful teaching speaking of problem- solving activities are those who take account the affective as well as the cognitive learners psychologically as well as intellectually. Of course, the communicative practice is the most important thing considered for the learners. Furthermore, Murcia[17]cites learners should not only be given the opportunity to say what they want to say in English, they also should be encouraged to develop an English personality with which they are comfortable.

In this teaching strategy (problem- solving), the interaction happens in which the language made by the learners is formed of resulting a feedback. This also treats the fluency of speaking as the result of an interaction between the learner's mental abilities and the linguistic environment. According to Ellis[18] the interaction is a manifest in the actual verbal interaction in which the learner and interlocutor participate that results language fluency and acquisition derived from the collaborative efforts.

Negotiation of meaning described in interaction of problem-solving activities is the ability viewed as variable and highly dependent upon context and purpose as well as on the roles and attitudes of all involved. On the other hand, it will develop the learner's ability to actually use the language for communication. As known that negotiation of meaning in teaching speaking becomes a lofty goal supported with materials, providing learners with a range of communicative tasks that are comfortable for them. It is also suggested to teacher to encourage more the students with the language

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[17]Murcia, C.C. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language 3rd*. New York: Heinle & Heinle. Thomson Learning Inc, 2001), p.22

[18]Ellis, R. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.129

instruction that stimulate the students to use their language naturally. According to Murcia[19]making an effort to get the gist and using strategies to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning are important to development of communicative competence.

Absolutely, selecting materials or topics is also determining the success of problem- solving activities in teaching speaking. In other side, Haycraff[20]supports that the effective way of stimulating the students' talking is to issue materials with natural situations that consist of the exchanges such as questions and answer, suggestions, and reactions, opinions and arguments, etc. furthermore, various changes and challenges in materials encourage the students to explore their ideas that whole class is involved each with everyone.

The selected materials according to students' need will bear the natural oral communication effectively and efficiently. The students need opportunities to develop their skills by being exposed to situations where the emphasis is on using their available resources. Littlewood[21]cites the personal interpretation of the situations is encouraging general confidence and fluency in speaking, allowing the learners to explore and exploit their communicative repertoire in any ways they wish. Moreover, Littlewood also gives considerations of some kinds of activities, situations, and roles that can help the speaking teacher in developing oral communicative tasks as follows:

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[19]Murcia, *Op.Cit*, p. 20

[20]Haycraff, J. *An Introduction to English Language Teaching*. (Singapore: Longman Group, Ltd, 1978), p. 82

[21]Littlewood. *Op.Cit*, p.62

1. The idea of capability covers not only the level of complexity of the language forms that learners can handle, but also the degree of independence with which they can handle them. Thus, as learners increase their linguistics competence, there will be scope for both greater complexity and greater independence.
2. The teacher should remember the point made in connection with classroom interaction, that structures and functions are not bound no specific situations. Therefore, the situations that he selects do not have to be restricted to those in which the learners expect to perform outside the classroom. Communication skills can be developed in the context of, say, a classroom discussion or a stimulated detective enquiry, and later be transferred to other contexts of language use.
3. On the other hand, teacher has to aim for maximum efficiency and economy in his students' learning. It therefore makes sense to engage them in a large proportion of situations which bears a direct a resemblance as possible to the situations where they will later need to use their communicative skills. In this way, he can be confident that most aspect of the language practiced (function, structures, vocabulary, and interpersonal skills) are relevant to learners' needs. This is particular important with older learners, whose need are comparatively well- defined.
4. The situations must be capable of stimulating learners to a high degree of communicative involvement. In part, this is another aspect of the point just made: learners are more likely to feel involved in situation where they can see the relevance of what they are doing and learning. In part, however it is a separate point. Many learners (notably younger learners) have no clear conception of their future needs with the

foreign language. They may therefore find the greater stimulation in situation that are of immediate rather than future relevance. These may be situations which arise in the course of classroom interaction. If simulation is used, they may be role- playing activities based on their familiar realms of experience (e.g., family, friends or school), rather than those which project into a less familiar future. (e.g,.booking hotels).

5. Similar considerations apply to the roles that learners are asked to perform in these situations. They may often be asked to stimulate a role that they are never likely to adopt in real life, such as that of a detective or waiter. This does not mean that the language they practice in that role is of no value. Each learner should be allocated a fair proportion of roles which are more directly relevant in one or both of two senses. (a) he might reasonably expect to have to perform that role in foreign language situations outside the classroom; (b) he is already familiar with the role in their native language. It is these roles that learner are likely to identify most deeply. Through them, therefore, they have the greatest chance of relating to the foreign language with their whole personality, rather than merely manipulating it as an instrument which is external to them.

Obviously, the consideration of teacher specifies the situation or condition in problem- solving activities will make the students familiar to be involved. It may be easier for the students to communicate ideas based on the problem discussed. Weir[22]suggests that the problems informed should

[22]Weir, C.J. *Understanding and Developing Language Tests.* (New York: Prentice Hall International Ltd, 1993), p.37

be actually identified to result ideas from the students as form of solution of the problems. However, it is important for teacher to measure the success of each situation or problem discussed, the account should be taken why the situation or problem is used, where, how, with whom, on what topic, and with what effect.

Meanwhile, Ur[23]asserts that problem- solving activity is particularly suitable for the students being involved, intended for the fairly advanced students that it usually work well, producing a high level participation and motivation; as with many simulation tasks, participants tend to become personally involved: they begin to see the characters as real people, and to relate to the problem as emotional issue as well as an intellectual and moral one.

Conclusion

The existence of speaking as the first manifestation of language has been the main priority in teaching and learning of language. Most of the speaking teachers have tried to apply the effective strategies and techniques to support the success of teaching and learning speaking. One of the effective strategies to teach speaking is called problem- solving.

By knowing and understanding the concepts of problem-solving strategy, teachers feel helped to motivate and improve the students' speaking ability. The students will feel free in develop their ideas of problem discussed as strongly expected in the development of communicative competence. Speaking naturally prioritizing **use** more than **usage** is one of the characteristics of problem- solving strategy.

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[23]Ur, P. *A Course in Language Teaching*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.128

Situations and problems in problem- solving activities also become the important aspect that determines the success of using this strategy in teaching speaking. Of course, teachers should show their role and ability to select the situation or problem according to the students' need.

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