

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter which follows will present a general overview of an action research study concerning the implementation of readers' theatre to improve students' speaking. This chapter is initiated with background of the study followed by the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, methodology and definitions of key terms, summed up with organization of the thesis in section 1.9.

1.1 Background of the Study

Communicative approach in the teaching of English as a foreign language focuses on how to help students to develop communication skills, to use the language through many ways or methods. Many activities were created based on the communicative approach that stimulates language used in real-life situations. Many course books with communicative approach have been written to provide teachers with ideas and methods to practically use them.

Communicative approach is considered relevant to the aims of the teaching of English as a foreign language especially in speaking skill where the objective is emphasized on the ability to communicate. Nunan (1999), argue that success in learning a language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language. In addition, most foreign language students evaluate their success in language learning by the improvement of their speaking proficiency. Therefore, developing speaking skills is of vital importance in EFL/ESL programs. However for some students, especially at the research site, speaking is the most challenging skill to do in language classroom.

Although all students reported that they had been learning English since junior high school, the researcher observed that many students were not able to speak English. The strong emphasis on the learning of English is on school final examination rather than acquiring the ability to communicate in English. Widiati & Cahyono (2006) found that Indonesian EFL learners face problems in developing their

speaking performance due to their linguistic and personality factors, and the types of classroom tasks provided by the teachers. Another study (Juhana, 2012) has shown that students' psychological factors such as fear of mistake, shyness anxiety hinder them from practicing their speaking in English class.

Since one of the factors which help students' development in learning relies on the teacher's role, therefore it is also the teachers who have to provide spaces for students to have genuine communication, to bring interaction through communicative activity by using various methods. Readers' theatre (henceforth RT) in this case, is one of drama techniques using communicative approach which emphasizes the role of the learners as active participants rather than passive ones. It is expected that through the practice of RT, students will show more enthusiastic to speak in the target language rather than silently following the class.

1.2 Research Problems

Students' speaking problems in foreign language learning cover many aspects including linguistic and personality factors. Students' inability to correctly pronounce words is one of pronunciation problems which could be easily detected. Using the same vocabularies with long pauses, trembling when presentation etc. also the problems of speaking commonly found in classroom. In addition, many students displayed a lack of confidence in speaking English especially in grammar because of the complexity of sentence rules. Relevant researchers argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of mistakes are the factors commonly hinder students from speaking (Thornburry, 2005; Sato, 2003). Consequently, speaking in foreign language has been one of the reasons why speaking is avoided. As it has been said by Bygate (in Carter & Nunan, 2001) if speaking practice in a foreign language classroom is avoided, then it will certainly block the ability of this skill because they are not trained to do it.

Concerning the problems of speaking mentioned previously, it is important for teachers to give more opportunities for students to practice speaking. Harmer (2007: 123) mentioned that there are three main reasons for getting students to speak in the

classroom. Firstly, speaking activities provide opportunities for rehearsal—chances to practice real-life speaking in the classroom. Secondly, speaking tasks can provide feedback both for the teacher and students. Last, speaking practice will give students more opportunities to activate the various elements of language they have stored in the brains, the more automatic their use of these elements become. Hence, students gradually become autonomous language users through practice using words and phrases fluently without very much conscious thought.

To provide speaking practice experience, teachers can use various communicative methods like communication games, acting from scripts, discussion, prepared talks, tests, simulation, or role plays. Among all of those alternatives, the writer chose RT. It is one of drama techniques which possible to be conducted for students in all levels because the actor plays the story without memorizing the scripts. Speaking activities involving drama elements provide a useful catalyst for real-life language use because learners take an imaginative leap beyond the classroom borders (Thornburry, 2005: 96).

The use of RT in language classroom has been investigated to help students' ability both the oral and written skills (Carrick, L., 2001, McKay, 2008, Young & Rasinsky, 2009). RT investigation and its implementation were mostly in the context for reading improvement. This study, on the other hand, attempts to apply RT in the context of building communicative skill. Concerning to insufficient previous related studies of RT in language teaching-learning, the present study strives to fill the gap by bringing RT into speaking classroom as the complimentary to previous studies. This study also attempts to learn about the attitudes of students towards RT implementation in English speaking class.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Referring to the statement of the problem, speaking classroom for foreign language learners should take an effective way to build a communicative classroom. The purpose of this action research study then is to uncover how RT improves speaking skill. The second purpose is to reveal more information on students' attitudes

towards the practice of RT in their speaking class, the disadvantages, if any, that might be encountered by the students regardless its advantages.

1.4 Research Questions

In line with the purposes mentioned previously, this research is intended to find the answers to the following research questions. First, how does RT improve students' speaking? Second, what are the students' attitudes towards the practice of RT they have engaged with?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focused mainly on two things. First, on how RT as a method improved speaking skill. Second, students' attitudes toward RT practice in speaking classroom. The study used a classroom action research. According to Punch (2009: 136), this research methodology aims to design inquiry and build knowledge for use in the service of action to solve practical problems. Hence, the inquiry deliberately starts from a specific practical or answer that practical question. The writer suggested that RT has contribution to students speaking when it is implemented in foreign language classroom. This study then specifically brought together action and reflection, theory and practice to reveal knowledge on how this method facilitated students' speaking improvement from the data obtained in each step of action research. The three cycles employed steps included devising a plan, implementing the action, doing observation, and the reflection.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The present study is expected to be significant for the practice of teaching and learning English with following contributions. The first is to enrich literature of RT research for language teaching-learning. The second is to provide teachers with information about students learning experiences to build communicative skills through action research with RT. The third is to provide information on RT as one of literature-based teaching to support students' development in learning language.

1.7 Methodology

In line with the purposes of this research, the writer conducted a classroom action research which consisted of three reflective cycles. Each cycle of action research passes through four broad phases as it has been proposed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988 in Burns, 2010: 7), namely planning, action, observation, and reflection. The first cycle may become continuing, or iterative, spiral of cycles which recur until the action researcher has achieved a satisfactory outcome and feels it is time to stop. Through these processes, the effectiveness of RT to encourage students speaking from each cycle is expected to be seen thoroughly.

The research site in this study was an English Department in a private University in Cianjur. Students get Speaking as one of compulsory subjects for some semesters as suggested in research site syllabus. However, the researcher observed that this subject has not optimally help students' ability to communicate. Based on the researcher's initial observation in some of Speaking sessions, several students were found uninterested to involve in Speaking classroom. In addition, the observation reported problems of speaking were basically come from two causes, the inadequate ability in speaking skills and the lack of practice in target language. Inadequate ability of speaking skills is indicated by words mispronunciation, long pauses, incorrect grammar used and poor vocabularies. Inadequate speaking practice are indicated by low participation, rare volunteering, unwilling to practice, avoiding to build communication with their peers. Those two major problems become the most leading factor to the failure at creating an encouraging classroom environment and improving students' ability to communicate in English. Regarding inadequate interest in participating, the teacher's teaching speaking strategy deserves to be evaluated with methods which optimally provide students with opportunities, interest and participation in completing the learning tasks. Based on the previously mentioned reason, more encouraging methods are strongly required to accomplish successful and effective teaching and learning that meet the learning goals.

Twenty students were included as participants in this study who were the first year students in academic term 2014/2015. Students' were various in ages which were around 18 to 35 years old. The class met once a week for two credits over eight-

weeks. The duration of each meeting per week was a period of ninety minutes. The participants were taught with RT activity. The teaching activity was conducted with various themes and each theme was taught for duration of one meeting for a week.

1.8 Definitions of Key Terms

Certain key terms used prominently in this study are communicative approach, RT, speaking activity and classroom action research. This part will define those key terms regarding the definition given by the experts.

- **Communicative approach** is one of the teaching approaches which is basically derived from the notion that learning language needs more than grammatical drilling but the emphasis is on the intended meaning of language to be able to use the language in social context (Bygate in Carter, R., & Nunan, D. (ed)., 2001: 14)
- **Readers Theatre** (henceforth **RT**) is an oral presentation of drama, prose or poetry by two or more readers that emphasizes the dramatic portrayal of various roles and characters through reading with few, if any, properties or costumes, and the performers are not required to memorize a script (McKay, 2008).
- **Speaking activities** as classroom activities that facilitate students to be able to use a language using appropriate features of speaking include paralinguistic and non linguistics. The paralinguistic features of speech such as pitch, stress, and intonation, whereas the non-linguistic elements such as gestures, body language, and expressions (Richards and Renandya, 2002: 204).
- **A classroom action research** is a method of research which is aimed at seeking solutions to problematic situation possessed by teachers and subsequently giving an attempt to improve the performances of either teachers teaching or students learning (Burns, 2010: 2).

1.9 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis pictures an action research study which encompasses six chapters. The first chapter presents general background information on the study, research

problem, purpose of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, and organization of the thesis. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature and previous related studies with regard to the implementation of RT in the teaching and learning. Chapter Three describes a conceptual framework consisting research design, method of data collection, research instrument and data analysis. Chapter Four describes the teaching program in which RT was implemented. Chapter Five presents the result or findings of the study. Chapter Six concludes the restatement of the research problems and findings, discusses what have been discovered in the study in relation to the current issues and recommendations for further research.