

GETTING STUDENTS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN CLASSROOM DISCUSSION THROUGH TEXT-BASED CMC

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Abstract

Language lab with computers has existed to help language learning since about 40 years ago. It has been used for second or foreign language learning. However, it does not automatically help students take part actively in classroom discussion. It needs a strategy that helps students actively involved in classroom discussion. This paper presents an action research project at Language Program at a college of Economics in Indonesia. This research developed text-based CMC (Computer-mediated Communication) strategy to make reluctant students participate actively in classroom discussion. This strategy consists of providing written materials and exercises on computers as well as written-feedback via computers. The activities designed in this strategy include reading on screen, working in small groups, doing homework, and working on feedback. This study revealed that text-based CMC instructional strategy was successful in making students who were reluctant to involve themselves in classroom discussion become eager to participate actively in classroom discussion. Text-based CMC designed with its activities helped students understand materials more easily and increase their motivation to learn English. Their comprehension and motivation to learn English then made them to take part actively in classroom discussion.

Keywords: Action Research, Classroom Discussion, Language Lab, Students' Involvement, Text-based CMC

INTRODUCTION

This paper shares an action research project conducted at a college of economics in Jakarta, Indonesia. The college facilitates its students to have TOEFL classes for about six semesters. The TOEFL program started in 2015. The program aims at helping students familiar with English and get score 450 of the TOEFL. The score is one of prerequisites to conduct final project before the students graduate. The TOEFL program is basically designed to prepare the alumni to get job more easily since competition among job seekers is getting harder.

Language lab with computers is better than language lab without computers even though language lab without computers is good (Fitzpatrick, 2004). This is the reason why the TOEFL program uses language labs with computers as classrooms. Unfortunately, the labs are not hybrid labs, labs that are able to do voice communication and control signals (Davies, Bangs, Frisby, & Walton, 2005). In fact, Davies et al. (2005) mention that such labs can provide instant voice communication between teacher and students. Besides, the teacher can monitor students' desktop. As a result, it was difficult for the teacher to communicate and check students' work one by one. The result was students lacked comprehension. They felt not confident and reluctant to be actively involved in classroom discussion as they did not understand the materials well.

However, the problem did not happen to all students. Few students, who got 450 or higher in the TOEFL practice pre-test, were highly motivated and very actively involved in classroom discussion. They were dominant in classroom discussion. Their domination 'killed' other students' confidence and motivation to be involved in classroom discussion. The reluctant students were very quiet and passive in classroom discussion and almost never able to answer questions provided by the teacher correctly. The classroom atmosphere was not an ideal classroom condition. It needed to be fixed. It needed an appropriate instructional strategy. As the TOEFL program was conducted in language lab with computers, CMC strategy was developed to get the reluctant students eager to participate actively in classroom discussion. And because the oral explanation did not help student to achieve good comprehension about the material, the materials were then designed in the form of text. Thus, this action research project developed text-based CMC instructional strategy to make reluctant students actively involved in classroom discussion.

Literature Review of CMC, CMC stands for computer-mediated communication. It has word 'computer' in which computer is used as a medium for communication. In this research, CMC is defined as one way to communicate with the help of computers. It is in line with definition of CMC stated by Herring (1996 as cited in Lin 2015) that CMC is communication among human via tools called computers.

Definition of computer is getting broader. Computer does not only mean PC or personal computer, that was invented in the late 1970s (Fitzpatrick, 2004). There are more tools that work as computer such as laptop, tablet, or even cell phones. Therefore, Fitzpatrick's (2004) states that definition of computer is flexible; it can be a PC, laptop, tablet or mobile phone.

Communication via computers needs internet connection. The size and weight of computer determine where the students and teacher should be while teaching instruction takes place. PC has big size and heavy. PC is usually used in homes or language labs. Tablets and mobile phones are light. Both can be brought anywhere. Hence, language learning with the use of computers can be held in a fixed room like in a language lab or in different places from where students are holding their tablets, mobile phones, or PC that they are next to. In other words, CMC can be done in the same or different places provided both teacher and students get connected to the internet.

Besides place, CMC can also be conducted in the same or different time. Language learning conducted in the same time is called synchronous CMC (SCMC), while language learning conducted in different time is called asynchronous CMC (ACMC). Robotel (2011) mentions that SCMC students must not be in the same room with the teacher; they may sit anywhere like in library or canteen. Yet, both teacher and students must have good and high speed internet connection. In later variation, students do not have to be in the same room nor the same time. They get tasks with the deadline of submitting their work. The teacher grades their work anytime and from anywhere as she gets connected to the internet. Most studies in language learning has been focusing on SCMC as it has been conducted by Payne and Ross (2005), Wu, Gao, and Zhang (2014), and Lin, Huang, and Liou (2013).

The forms of CMC can be oral or text. Yanguas (2010) investigated the effectiveness of oral-based CMC among intermediate level of Spanish learners. His study revealed that oral-based SCMC groups negotiated meaning in conversation. Besides, it was revealed that video groups performed better as there was lack of eye contact in the audio groups. In addition, the study showed that there were no differences between video and face-to-face (FTF) groups, and the pattern of oral-based SCMC turn-taking was almost the same as the pattern of FTF. However, the interaction pattern of oral-based SCMC was much better than text-based SCMC. Whereas, Lin, et al. (2013) did meta-analysis about the effectiveness of text-based SCMC. They found that text-based SCMC did better than other means of communication like ACMC, FTF, or video-chat groups. They also found that students with intermediate proficiency had more benefits from SCMC tasks as they were grouped in pairs or small groups.

Research on CMC also has been concerning about giving appropriate feedback. Morris (2005) studied provision of corrective feedback among elementary students of Spanish in immersion class. The study found that most feedback resulted in immediate repair in conversation. Study of which types of feedback that is better for writing was conducted by Seileek and Abualsha'r (2014). Their study revealed three patterns: 1) students who got feedback performed better than student who did not get

feedback, 2) students who got track changes feedback performed better significantly than those who got recast and metalinguistic feedback, and 3) students who got recast feedback performed better significantly than those who got metalinguistic feedback. Feedback is also provided by a software named Criterion as it was studied by Lavolette, Polio, and Kahng (2015). Their study found that 1) the software provided about 75% error codes but missed a lot of language errors, 2) students responded to the feedback 73% during the semester, and 3) types of feedback whether immediate or delayed did not affect students' response rate nor accuracy on their first draft of writing.

Choosing Appropriate CMC, computer is not only PC; it is also a laptop computer, tablet computer, or even cell phones (Fitzpatrick, 2004). To be more flexible for both students and teacher, computer that was used in this action research project was all types of computer. PC was used when students were learning English in class (lab) while other types of computer were used for doing homework. Therefore, the variations of CMC used in this research were both SCMC and ACMC. SCMC was done when students were learning in classroom while ACMC was done when students did homework. The internet connection used in classroom was LAN (Local Area Network) while for homework, students and teacher used their own internet connection: mobile data connection, modem, or wifi.

Form of communication in this research used text-based CMC. Text-based SCMC was used for communication between teacher and students in classroom. It is due to meta-analysis done by Lin, et al. (2013) showing that text-based SCMC group performed better than other forms of communications. Besides, it has been tried out that oral explanation did not succeed in helping students understand materials well. However, FTF was used for communication among students because study conducted by Yanguas (2010) showed that there was no difference between video-chat and FTF group. The other reason of using FTF, not video-chat was because the internet connection in the lab was slow. FTF was also used by teacher and students in discussion where this part of classroom activities is the moment to see if the criteria of success of this action research are achieved.

Communication among students occurred when students were in groups. This research developed a group activity as Lin, et al. (2013) state their study revealed that in-pair or small groups give more benefits to intermediate students. Each group was led by the most proficient students because study conducted by Wu, et al. (2014) revealed that in the beginning stage, people like to chat with more proficient people. It was expected that the most proficient students share their knowledge to the lower ones and the lower ones asked for help to the more proficient to help them understand the materials well.

Feedback is very important as study of Seileek and Abualsha'r (2014) revealed that students who got feedback performed better than who did not. In this research, feedback was given by the teacher, not using any software. Using software is good, but still software makes mistakes as it is proven by study conducted by Lavolette, et al. (2015). Types of feedback used were 'track changes', explicit correction, and elicitation. Track change was used as Seileek and Abualsha'r (2014) showed that track changes worked better than recast and metalinguistic feedback. Explicit correction and elicitation were used as I assumed that students need to know the correct answers. Feedback given was immediate and delayed feedback as both types of feedback have no differences on students' response rate and accuracy (Lavolette et al., 2015). Immediate feedback was used in the classroom while delayed feedback was for homework.

CMC Teaching Scenario, based on the elucidation of choosing appropriate CMC, the lesson plan of CMC developed in this research contains four main activities for students. They are reading materials on screen, working in small groups, doing homework, and working on feedback.

Reading materials on screen was developed as the first classroom activity. Students entered the classroom then they opened a shared folder that had been created by the teacher. Students were allowed to sit alone while reading materials or sit next to their leader to ask for materials that they probably did not understand while reading by themselves. The materials were developed by the teacher in students' national language, *bahasa* Indonesia as TOEFL program's aim is making the students understand English and know how to answer TOEFL questions. Hence, comprehension was the top priority.

Working in small groups was these conductivity. After students read the materials, they worked in groups to do TOEFL structure exercise. The exercise was below the materials. The exercise was ten sentences of TOEFL structure exercise. Students had to decide whether the sentences correct or incorrect with the reasons of their answers. After done with the exercise, students put their work in another shared folder named 'answers' that had been created by the teacher. Teacher soon checked their work, colored the incorrect answers, graded the work, saved as the graded file by typing number '1' which means students had to make revision one, '2' for revision two, and so forth to another folder named 'revision'.

Ten minutes before class ended, students saved the materials file to their own flash drive or sent the file to their email address. In the file, below group-work exercise, there was home work exercise. Homework's deadline was one day before the following meeting. Feedback type for homework was explicit correction. Teacher colored the incorrect answers, graded the homework, and put the correct answers. After that, the teacher sent the corrected file back to the students' email address.

The mentioned activities were done in the first meeting. Starting from the second meeting, class began with quiz. Quiz consisted of exercise of previous meeting and homework. Quiz was orally answered by the reluctant students. Students who answered correctly got 10 plus points to their exercise score: score of group work or homework. And students who answered incorrectly got 5 plus points. Feedback used was elicitation, correct answers came from students. Teacher only confirmed the answers. Quiz session is classroom discussion session that is meant in this action research.

Research Question, This action research project aimed at developing a strategy called text-based CMC to make reluctant students actively involved in classroom discussion. Therefore, the research question is "How does text-based CMC make reluctant students eager to be actively involved in classroom discussion?"

METHODOLOGY

As this research was going to solve a classroom problem by developing an instructional strategy, the research design was action research. Latief (2012) mentions classroom action research's aim is to develop an innovative strategy to solve classroom problems. He states that the process is repeated cycles in which each cycle consists of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The result of the first cycle is evaluated by analyzing if all criteria of success of strategy to solve the problems are all achieved. If they are not achieved yet in the first cycle, the research should go to the second cycle and so forth until the criteria of success are all achieved.

Procedure, the research was conducted for 5 weeks. Before week 1, students were informed about the action research planning and what to do in class starting from week 1. Week 1 to 4, students were taught by using text-based CMC. Week 5, students filled out an online survey.

Participants, the participants of this research were 14 out of 20 students. The 14 students were students who did not achieve 450 score of TOEFL practice. They were passive students, who were reluctant to be actively involved in classroom discussion.

Data Instruments, data of this research was data related to the success of the strategy in solving the problem. The criteria of the success of the strategy to solve the problem were the changes of students' behavior while they are in classroom discussion. As the problems were 1) the reluctant students were very quiet and passive in classroom discussion and 2) they were almost never able to answer questions provided by the teacher correctly, the criteria of the success of the strategy were 1) the reluctant students become eager to participate actively in classroom discussion and 2) they become able to answer questions correctly in most of the time. Therefore, the instruments were observation and an online survey.

RESULTS

Data came from two instruments: observation and questionnaire. Data from observation shows the success of the strategy to make the reluctant students actively involved in classroom discussion. In classroom discussion, students were willing to be involved actively. They raised their own hands without being pointed by the teacher. They could answer questions correctly most of the time. The changes of their behavior were because of the changes of their view toward classroom discussion. In questionnaire, a student wrote that classroom discussion activity was an opportunity to practice their own comprehension. Another student mentioned that classroom discussion activity benefited his way of thinking. The rest of students state that they were motivated to try to answer the questions

In reading on screen activity, students looked happy reading materials on screen. It is different from their faces when listening to the teacher in the previous strategy. Thirteen out of fourteen students wrote in the questionnaire that this activity made them understand materials easily. A student wrote, "The materials made by the teacher were concise. They helped me understand the materials more easily and increase my motivation."

Next activity included in the strategy was working in small groups led by the most proficient students. The classroom atmosphere seemed dynamic. Students talked to each other. This activity reduced stress students felt. Seven students wrote in the questionnaire that they were helped by the grouping system because they could share knowledge and help each other. Seven students expressed that working in groups helped them understand materials more easily. A student wrote, "Being helped by students who are more expert on the materials helped to increase my motivation."

Another CMC activity included in the strategy was doing homework using virtual communication via computers. Homework helped students understand materials better as homework was an individual work. Students got benefits of doing homework with different reasons. Some wrote that they comprehended better because 1) they did task individually so that they could check their own comprehension, 2) they could restudy what had been learnt in classroom, 3) they were encouraged to work harder to understand English language, and 4) they were motivated to learn English.

Then, the next characteristic of CMC is feedback sent via computers. Feedback gave students opportunity to know which is incorrect and what the correct answer should be. Feedback seemed helped them tremendously. All students said that feedback did help them understand material more easily. Six students mention that feedback helped them know their mistakes. A student wrote, "Feedback helped me evaluate my work." Another student wrote, "Feedback encouraged me to think."

According to the data, text-based CMC designed in this action research project could make the reluctant students eager to be actively involved in classroom discussion and able to answer questions correctly in most of the time. Text-based CMC made the students understand materials more easily so that they became more motivated to learn English and to check their own comprehension by being active in classroom discussion.

DISCUSSIONS

Text-based CMC could make passive students became actively involved in classroom discussion. Willingness to be actively involved in a discussion was driven by good comprehension. The involvement of the students reflects the comprehension students had after being taught by text-based CMC. In other words, text-based CMC could make students actively involved in classroom discussion because text-based CMC could make students understand materials more easily and better. It is in line with study conducted by Lin et al (2013) revealing that students taught by text-based CMC had better performance than those who were taught by other means of communication like AVMC, FTF, or video-chat. The design of text-based CMC in this project contains reading on screen activity. It supports the finding that reading works better than listening like in text-based CMC that encourages students to read, not to listen like in face-to-face or video-chat communication.

Besides reading on screen activity, working in small groups led by the more proficient students is another element of text-based CMC in this action research project. Working in small groups did help students understand materials more easily as they could share knowledge and help

each other. This finding is in line with study conducted by Lin et al. (2013) showing that intermediate students got more benefits from in-pair or small groups. Another characteristic of text-based CMC designed in this action research is members led by more proficient students. Students got benefits of the grouping system. The lower proficient students could get more explanation from the more proficient students, and the more proficient students could share their knowledge to the lower ones. It is as expected in this study that is vertical relationship communication. Wu et al. (2014) revealed that in the beginning, people tend to communicate with the more proficient ones. In this action research study, such pattern of relationship gives more benefits to the lower proficient students.

Another element of text-based CMC in this action research is online homework. In this study, students got many benefits of homework. They had opportunity to do task individually, to practice their own comprehension, to restudy English at home, and to motivate themselves to learn English. The objective of homework was to provide more feedback to students beside feedback given in classroom. Both feedback given in classroom and at home, which is in homework, made students know their mistakes so that they could evaluate their comprehension. Feedback did make them understand materials better. The finding of this study supports study conducted by Seileek and Abualsha'r (2014) showing that students who received feedback performed better than those who did not receive feedback. Thus, feedback contributes to students' comprehension and make them brave to be actively involved in classroom discussion.

To conclude, text-based CMC did make students to participate actively in classroom discussion. Text-based CMC could solve students' reluctance in classroom discussion. Text-based CMC solved the problems by making students understand materials more easily by providing them activities of reading on screen, working in small groups led by the more proficient students, doing homework, and working on feedback.

CONCLUSION

This action research developed a strategy called text-based CMC. The strategy was designed to make students eager to take part actively in classroom discussion. The strategy consists of four activities. They are reading on screen, working in small groups the more proficient students, doing homework, and working on feedback. The strategy succeeded in solving the classroom problem. Students became eager to participate actively in classroom discussion. The strategy did help students understand materials more easily so that they were confident to be involved in classroom discussion. This strategy will work well for teachers who have the same problem that is having students who are reluctant to take part actively in classroom discussion and students who only speak up if the teacher points them to speak or answer questions.

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