

Creative Teaching Methods to Improve Student's Confidence and Motivation in Conversation

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ABSTRACT

The conventional teaching materials and methods used for the conversation classes improved the students pronunciation and intonation significantly. Nevertheless, these methods of teaching speaking do not seem to give students confidence to be involved in spontaneous conversations and create their dialogues. As a result, when asked to create the dialogues, they often look for ready-made dialogues on the internet that they present as their dialogues in classroom activities or even exams. These activities are not good to help them building their self-confidence in using the language; neither does improving their fluency in speaking. This research attempts to prove the creative teaching methods can improve the students confidence and motivation in the conversation class and these methods, which have been proven to improve student self-confidence and motivation use a student-centred approach which provides opportunities for students to build their confidence and be more creative when practicing their speaking skills. This quasi-experimental research in which one conversation class was taught creative whereas another class, the comparison class, was taught using the conventional teacher-centered methods. The qualitative data collected from questionnaires, an observations and teacher's notes and quantitative data obtained from questionnaires an pre- and post-tests showed that the self-confidence and motivation of the experimental group increased significantly. This in turn improved their speaking skills as reflected their grades

1. INTRODUCTION

The search for English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching methods and strategies which effectively enhance the students' learning and thus their acquisition of the English language learning has always been a topic that has attracted the attention of both researchers and educators alike. Apart from this, researchers have identified that student motivation and self-confidence in learning the language greatly influences the

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progress they make. In other words, students with higher motivation and self-confidence tend to be more successful in learning the language. In relation to this, many teaching methods have been developed to improve students' motivation and self-confidence as a means to help them succeed in becoming fluent users of the language.

In observations made over the past two years of the conversation courses that students of the English Study Program take, it was found that although most of the students developed better pronunciation and intonation, many still lacked confidence when they were asked to create their own dialogs or participate in spontaneous conversations or roleplay. They did well in adapting the dialogues presented in the modules which they had practiced in class.

However, when asked to produce their own conversations even for situations already practiced, a majority of the students often ended up using ready-made conversations that they found in the English lessons available on the internet. This can be considered to be evidence of the students' lack of self-confidence in using the language spontaneously. They frequently asked for more preparation time so that they could write down the conversations before practicing them in front of the class. This naturally defies the objective of the conversation course which is to develop the students' ability to participate spontaneously and effectively in conversations on various topics and in different situations.

This seems to imply that the students had not yet managed to build the confidence they needed to express themselves spontaneously in English using the speaking skills and other language skills they learned in their classes. Self-confidence and motivation to use the spoken language seemed to be the elements that needed to be strengthened and reinforced in the speaking classes.

In conversation classes, where interaction is essential, students are often reluctant to speak up due to various reasons. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of self-confidence to speak up. From interviews with students, it was found that many were afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by their peers or put down by their teachers. Other students were inhibited from participating in speaking activities due to their reserved and shy dispositions. Such students tend to sit quietly and listen attentively. They find it difficult to speak up particularly when a few voluble and dominant students keep jumping in with their responses or answers. Other students keep silent because they do not have anything to say due to unfamiliarity with the topic, a lack of interest or motivation to speak up. Failure to participate in the speaking activities results in students being trapped in a vicious circle of silence. Without practice, it is almost impossible to improve their speaking skills.

It is the responsibility of the teachers to cut off this vicious circle and build the students' self-confidence and motivate them to speak up in class. This could be achieved through creative teaching which is said to increase the levels of motivation and self-confidence of the learners and prepare them with the flexible skills they will need for communication in the real world (Richards, J.C., 2013).

Based on the research questions above, the objective of this research is to improve the students motivation and confidence through creative teaching methods.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Based on the objectives and subjects of this study, the research implemented the Non-equivalent Comparison Groups Design (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). This quasi-experimental research design was used because the subjects in the experimental and the comparison groups were not randomly selected but were students already assigned to parallel Situational Conversation classes by the administrators of the English Study Program. The instruction of the experimental class implemented creative teaching strategies and techniques, while the other class was taught the same material in a conventional teacher-centred manner.

This study involved two researchers: the main researcher who is also the teacher in charge of both classes, namely the experimental class and the control or comparative class, and the second researcher who assisted the main researcher in preparing teaching materials and teaching the classes, carrying out class observations and collecting other data. Thus, this research can be considered to be teacher research which aims at improving the teaching and learning process in the Conversation class (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

The research was conducted at the English Language Study Program, Faculty of Letters, Pamulang University during the even semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. The classes were the first face-to-face classes after 3 semesters of online learning due to the Covid pandemic. However, since the Covid pandemic was still not completely over, health protocol had still to be followed and the face-to-face meeting time was reduced to 60 minutes from the regular 100-minute classes. This posed a few challenges in the implementation of the lessons using the creative teaching method. This was due to the fact that creative and student-centered activities tend to require more time than teacher-led activities. The research period covered the first half of the semester i.e., 8 weeks including the mid-semester exam week.

The subjects of the research consisted of 2 (two) classes of second semester students of the English Study Program taking the Situational Conversation course meeting on Wednesday mornings, with one class starting at 8.50 and the second class at 10.30. The subjects were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling as the main researcher was the instructor in charge of these two classes. This facilitated the implementation of the study and did not interfere with the learning process and targets stipulated in the syllabus.

The second class was determined to be the experimental class so that it would be easier for the teachers to implement the conventional teaching method in the comparison class first and then teach the creative version in the experimental class. Out of the 24 students registered for the experimental class, only 20 students had taken both the pre and post-tests, answered the questionnaires, and attended all classes. They became the subjects of the experimental group and 20 students with the same

criteria were taken from the comparison class. Thus, the subjects included in this study were as follows:

- Experimental group (EG) : 20 students: 8 males + 12 females; age range between 18-20 with an average age of 18.65
- Comparison group (CG) : 20 students: 5 males + 15 males; age range between 18-21 and an average age of 19.35.

The students from both classes had similar educational backgrounds. 45% graduated from Senior High Schools in the vicinity of Tangerang, Banten and 20% from West Java, 20% from Jakarta and the rest coming from places as far as West Sumatera, Kalimantan and South Sulawesi.

In response to their motivation to study English, in both groups 55% of the students selected the option "I'm very interested in English Language and Literature" which shows that many students had an integrative motivation to study English. Gardner and Lambert (1972) described integrative motivation "Learners who are integratively motivated want to learn the language because they want to get to know the people who speak that language". Whereas the rest had instrumental motivation 15% of both classes wanted to find a good job whereas 30% of the EG and 15% of the CG wanted to be English teachers or translators. Instrumental motivation as Gardner and Lambert (1972) defined "Learners with an instrumental motivation want to learn a language because of a practical reason such as getting a salary bonus or getting into college"

The teaching material used for the experimental class consisted of the modules that have already been developed for the Situational Conversation Course. The comparison class practiced the dialogues and learned new vocabulary and structures by doing the exercises in the modules in the conventional manner. The modules were also used as the basic teaching material for students of the experimental class, however, in addition to this, they were given student-centred activities that encouraged them to make their own conversations using the new vocabulary and structures. At other times they were called on to make spontaneous conversations in front of the class based on specified background information, somewhat like an instant roleplay or a situation they created themselves.

Another technique used was designed to raise students' awareness of the language of interaction. The students were asked to suggest other ways of saying the utterances in the dialogues in different situations which required them to use their critical thinking. Doing this, enabled them to activate their previous knowledge and produce utterances that were similar in meaning but expressed in a different manner. Another alternative activity required the students to continue a given dialogue creating their own scenario. This encouraged them to think creatively. Students seemed to enjoy doing this as they tried to catch their peers' attention by creating humorous situations and using the names of contemporary celebrities.

To accommodate the addition of other activities, many of the exercises in the original module were assigned for independent learning, or as homework in writing or recorded with a peer and submitted to the teachers. The students were also

suggested to check their work with their peers before handing them to the teachers. To do these activities, the students were assigned to work with a fixed pair or "study buddy" to make sure that they always had someone to practice with outside as well as inside the class. Another reason for the "study buddy" system was that by working together in a fixed pair they could help each other better and thus make progress together.

The face-to-face classes were held once a week for 60 minutes from the regular 100 minutes in accordance with the pandemic protocol. This posed significant challenges in implementing the creative teaching methods prepared, as more time was needed to carry them out as compared to the conventional teacher-led activities. The creative teaching methods required more active student engagement and participation.

The activities implemented in the classroom were designed based on the principles of teaching speaking (Westwood, et al. 1979) and did not follow a fixed sequence, to keep students stimulated and avoid boredom. The activities were made as learner-centered as possible taking into consideration their interests and needs. The variety of activities included was determined by the time available. Initially, imitative exercises (Brown, 2007) were planned to be skipped. However, in response to the needs and demands of the students, the imitative exercises were included. The students felt that such exercises helped them to improve their pronunciation and intonation directly and significantly.

The lessons were started with activities that activated students' schema or their background knowledge of the topic or language functions to be discussed. This made it easier for them to absorb new knowledge and vocabulary.

Furthermore, the teachers made a special effort to build a good rapport with the students and tried to make the atmosphere in the class more relaxed and cheerful. To do this, the teachers shared their own experiences or observations that would boost both students' motivation and self-confidence. They also spiced the lessons with relevant humor to grab the students' attention and keep them engaged. When there was time, a short game was included such as Word Chains.

In addition, the teachers made it a point to give positive comments on the performance of their students in class. Even if a pair of students did not do well in terms of the completion of the task, the teachers would always find some positive compliment to pay their students before giving them corrective feedback; for instance, the teachers complimented students on their creative efforts and the way they role-played the dialogue in a lively manner before pointing out their weaknesses. Weak areas of the students were usually referred to in a positive way, as areas that needed to be improved. Significant progress made by weaker students were celebrated in class. More advanced students were applauded but still challenged to do better. Classes always ended with a positive note and a reminder for them to keep practicing. The saying "Practice makes Perfect" became a favourite saying among the students and teachers.

All teaching and learning materials were delivered to the students digitally, and thus in the classroom the students used their cell phones to access them. There were no photocopied handouts or exercises. Everything was done using their smartphones. In addition, students were also encouraged to look up cultural background, the meaning of words and their pronunciation using their smartphones.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal data obtained from the first questionnaire administered to both groups showed that the experimental and the comparison groups were similar in terms of sex, age, education and social background. The dominant sex in both groups was female, where 60% of the EG were females and 40% males. Whereas the CG had a slightly higher number of females, that is 75% females and 25% males. The age of students in both classes ranged from 18-21 years with a majority or more than 70% of students in the 18-19 age bracket. Their educational and social backgrounds were also similar with the majority of 95% of the students originating from SMA (General Senior High School) or SMK (Vocational School) and 5% from MAN (Islamic Senior High School). 45% graduated from High Schools in Tangerang, 20% from schools in West Java, 20% from schools in Jakarta and the rest or 15% from schools in Central and East Java and even cities outside Java, namely Central Kalimantan, West Sumatera and Riau.

In answer to the question "How much time do you spend on learning or practicing English per day outside the classroom?" 90% of the CG reported practicing English up to 1 hour a day and 10% spent up to 2 hours or more. Whereas 75% of the EG students spent up to 1 hour a day practicing and the rest (25%) spent up to 2 hours or more learning or practicing English. This shows that their level of motivation to learn was on the whole quite similar.

A comparison of the pre-test results of the EG and the CG in Table 1 below shows that the Pre-test average score of the CG were slightly higher than those of the Experimental group, i.e. 79.85 for the CG compared to 77.75 for the EG. The range of pre-test scores of the CG was 78-83, or a difference of 5 points between the highest scores and the lowest scores; whereas the EG had a much wider range of 68-81, with a difference of 13 points between the lowest and the highest scores. This implied that the proficiency levels of the EG were more varied than those of the CG and on average slightly lower too.

When the pre- and post-test scores from the two groups were compared it could be seen that on the whole, the EG had made more progress compared to CG. There was a jump from the EG's average pretest score of 77.75 to the average post-test score of 82.85. This meant that there was an average gain of 7.2 points or the scores were 7.2% higher than the pre-test scores. Whereas when the pre-test scores of the CG were compared with the post-test scores, it was found that the average scores only improved slightly from 79.86 to 81.45. In other words, the average gain achieved by the CG was 1.55 points or 1.55%.

A closer look at the scores of the EG revealed that subject E20 who had the lowest pre-test score achieved the highest gain, i.e. 11 points, from 68 in the pre-test to 79 in the post test.

Table 1. Students' Response to the Creative Teaching Strategies and Techniques

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I believe that different kinds of speaking activities create a more motivating learning environment	20%	80%	0	0	0
2	I felt more relaxed and confident to use English in this class.	30%	40%	30%	0	0
3	I was more active and engaged in the speaking activities in class	10%	45%	45%	0	0
4	Working with a fixed partner helped me to improve my speaking skills.	40%	40%	15%	5%	0
5	I managed to make dialogues with my partner without copying conversations from the internet.	25%	60%	10%	5%	0
6	Creating our own dialogues and recording them was a very effective activity.	30%	40%	20%	10%	0
7	In this class, communicating was more important than getting the grammar right.	30%	45%	25%	0	0
8	My peers never laughed at me or made fun of me when I was speaking in front of the class.	40%	30%	25%	5%	0
9	The way the teachers introduced the lessons increased my motivation.	40%	50%	10%	0	0
10	Comments from my teachers gave me more confidence to try harder.	70%	15%	15%	0	0
11	The teachers used humour to make the class more lively.	10%	45%	40%	5%	0
12	The friendly relationship the teachers developed with their students made me feel relaxed in class.	40%	45%	15%	0	0
13	I can apply the knowledge and skills that I get from this class	25%	50%	25%	0	0

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	to communicate in my other classes and in real life.					
14	I'm satisfied with my achievements in English in this class.	15%	40%	30%	5%	10%
15	Using our cell phones as learning media instead of handouts was not effective for me.	0	5%	30%	40%	25%

The responses from the students show that the majority of the students had a positive attitude towards the activities implemented in class and the assignments they had to do. In fact, all of the students (100%) felt that the different kinds of activities implemented in the class created a motivating learning environment. 70% of the students felt that they were more relaxed and confident and 55% thought that they were more active and engaged in the classroom activities. 90% felt that the way the teachers introduced the lessons made them more motivated.

In addition to using a variety of activities, the teachers also focused on building a conducive atmosphere for learning by making special effort to build a good rapport with the students by getting to know them better and sharing success stories that could inspire them. Giving positive feedback to the students also had a considerable effect on the EG students. Teachers can also support students by showing appreciation for what they have done and using praise as a means to build up student confidence. Even if in terms of language usage the conversation practice was below standard, compliments were still given about some other aspect that went right. To make sure that all students were getting the attention they need, a student in a comment in the questionnaire suggested that it would be ideal if teachers could identify slow learners and give special attention to them.

In a comment on an open-ended question concerning the students' learning experience, the student who had made the greatest gain in the class said that the attitude of the teachers really helped her to gain back the confidence and motivation to learn that she had lost when she was bullied in high school.

One particularly satisfying result was revealed in the EG was the response to Q 5 concerning students making their own dialogues without copying ready-made conversations from the internet. This practice had always been a matter of concern for the teachers because most students were coming up with the same dialogues that they had found on the internet. Relying on ready-made sources did not help them to achieve spontaneity and develop their creativity. By using internet dialogues, the students were not pushing themselves to produce their own dialogues and as a result this slowed down their progress. In this study, 75% of the students stated that they had not just simply presented material on the internet as their own. Only 1 student or 5% did not agree with the statement. This was also evidenced in the dialogues the students role-played in class as well as during the mid-exams. Most of these dialogues

were original dialogues students had created by themselves or at the least adapted. Very few students had used conversations copied from English lessons on the internet.

The creative teaching methods implemented in the EG must have had a considerable impact on their progress in learning which is reflected in the response to (Q 14) concerning their satisfaction in the achievements experienced. 50% of the students reported that they were satisfied with their achievements. This is supported by the average gain of 7.2 points that the EG students achieved in the post-test as compared to the pre-test scores.

However, apart from the positive effects the EG students experienced, they also had a few concerns and experienced dissatisfaction as evidenced by their responses to questions number 4, 5, 6, 8 and 11. In response to Q 4 concerning working with a fixed partner, one student (5%) was not happy working with a fixed partner because she could not work well with her partner. For Q 5, one student was not very confident about creating her own dialogues without copying material from the internet. Two students expressed their concern about the assignments to make video recordings in Q 6. It was found that this was due to the difficulty they had in finding time to make the video recording together. For Q 14, 15% or 3 students were not satisfied with their achievement and more than 50% of EG were satisfied and 30% were neutral.

The last question, Q 15 concerned the media used for the material taken from the prepared modules for Situational Conversation. All material was digital and students accessed the material using their devices, mostly smartphones. No printed material was used which was different from the previous classes. The teachers were concerned that the students might find this an obstacle for their learning. However, the responses to this question showed that the majority or 65% of the students did not find this a problem. Only one student felt disadvantaged and would have preferred printed material, while the rest or 35% were neutral.

Table 2. A Comparison of Pre-Test and Post Test Results of EG and CG

Exp. Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	Comp. Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
E1	77	82	5	C1	78	80	1
E2	79	85	6	C2	80	85	5
E3	79	85	6	C3	79	80	1
E4	79	85	6	C4	78	79	1
E5	77	83	5	C5	80	83	3
E6	80	85	5	C6	80	81	1
E7	77	81	4	C7	81	83	2
E8	77	85	8	C8	78	79	1
E9	76	81	5	C9	80	81	1
E10	76	80	4	C10	79	80	1
E11	78	80	2	C11	80	81	1
E12	81	85	4	C12	82	80	1
E13	79	83	4	C13	81	81	1
E14	78	80	3	C14	80	83	3

Exp. Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	Comp. Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
E15	78	84	6	C15	80	81	1
E16	80	85	5	C16	82	84	2
E17	80	85	5	C17	79	80	1
E18	79	81	2	C18	80	81	1
E19	77	83	6	C19	80	82	2
E20	68	79	11	C20	80	81	1
Mean	77.75	82.85	7.2	Mean	79.85	82.45	1.55

In order to ensure that this gain in the average scores of the EG were to some extent the result of the creative teaching methods used in the classroom, the students were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their response to the creative teaching methods used over a period of 7 weeks. The statements in the questionnaire were related to the techniques and strategies used to implement creative teaching as stipulated by Richards (2013) and the students' response to them.

Students were also requested to evaluate whether there had been any changes in their motivation and self-confidence. In addition, they were asked to identify the area in which they felt they had made the most progress. The following pie charts, Figure 1 and Figure 2 depict their self-evaluation.

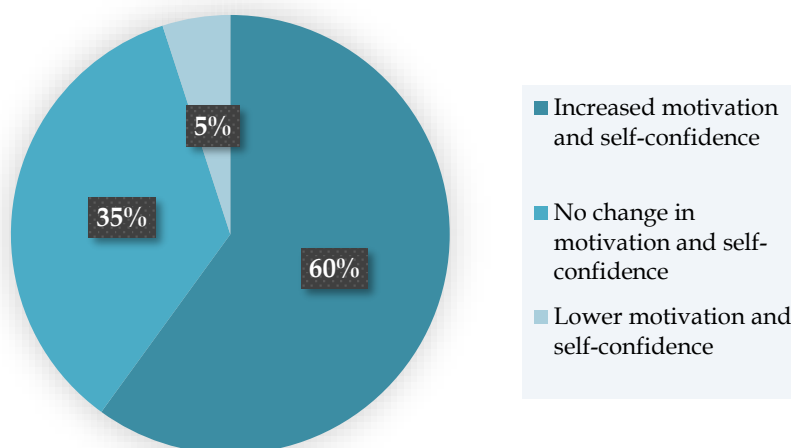


Figure 1. Students' self-evaluation of Motivation and Self-confidence

Figure 1 shows that 60% of the students felt that their motivation and self-confidence had improved. This is supported by the classroom observations and teachers' daily evaluation of the students. The 35% who reported no change in motivation and self-confidence said that they were already motivated and had sufficient self-confidence when they joined the class. This was also evidenced by the teachers' observations and evaluation. Only one student reported lower motivation and self-confidence but did not explain the reason for this

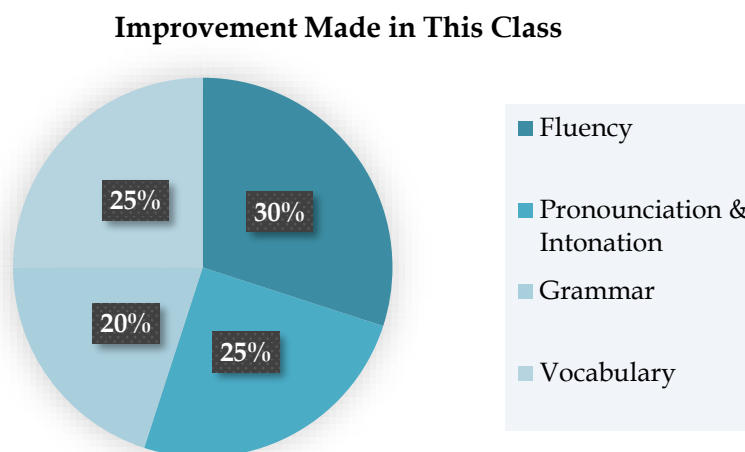


Figure 2. Students' Self-evaluation of Area of Improvement

In terms of improvement, it was found that 30% students felt they had improved in fluency, 25% felt they had improved in pronunciation & intonation and another 25% felt their vocabulary had improved; whereas the remaining 20% found that their grammar had improved.

In their comments about the class, 50% of the students enjoyed, liked or even loved the class. One student wrote "The class is fun and everyone gets a turn." Another student wrote: "I feel more comfortable. Mixing the two languages made me more confident. More enjoyable and more beneficial." The way the teachers spoke English most of the time was another comment made by a student. Several students revealed that they found the support from their peers really helpful. One student summed up the effect the class had on the students: "Really enjoyed the class. The teaching and learning technique improved my self-confidence and motivation to learn."

4. CONCLUSION

One of the ongoing concerns of the majority of EFL teachers is making their classes conducive for learning and enhancing the achievements of their students. This research was conducted to alleviate those concerns. The data obtained in this study revealed that the use of creative teaching was successful in enhancing students' confidence in speaking English and improved their motivation to learn. The fact that the majority of students had a positive attitude towards the class suggests that this method could be implemented in other speaking classes. Many of the students felt that the way the teachers treated and communicated with them as well as the way they taught the lessons had a big impact on increasing their motivation to learn.

Thus, it can be concluded that an essential part of the teacher's role is to try various methods and strategies to create a supportive learning environment in the classroom where learners feel interested, safe and secure to determine and pursue their learning goals. All this sums up what creative teaching is all about. Creative

teaching of English not only improved the students' language skills but it was also shown to develop students' knowledge, abilities, thoughtfulness, and attitudes. Therefore, teachers hold an important role in promoting creativity within their field of teaching and providing their students with sufficient opportunities to foster their creative abilities.

Since this research focused on the use of creative teaching for speaking skills in particular, further research should try to investigate its use for the other language skills, i.e. listening, reading and writing.

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