

The Effectiveness of English Club as Free Voluntary Speaking Activity Strategy in Fostering Speaking Skill in Saudi Arabia Context

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the significance of English club in fostering speaking skill in Saudi Arabia context. It hypothesizes that Saudi university students are enthusiastic to learn authentic English and English club as free voluntary speaking activity with low anxiety assists Saudi university students practice English joyfully. This study aims at identifying the advantages of activating English club in promoting speaking skill and raising university English teachers' awareness of the importance of using it. The study method used was the descriptive analytic method. The study concludes that English club assists Saudi students be free from language anxiety and traditional boring routine classroom activities, it helps them practice speaking English joyfully and English club fosters critical thinking, persuasive and argumentative skills among students. It recommends that English club should be scheduled as the essential part of a course in the semester not as academic activity, English club should conduct remedial classes concerning speaking strategies and skills which assist students communicate tactfully and the native speakers should help conduct the English club in order to create realistic language context in terms of phonological aspect.

1- INTRODUCTION

Learning English language as a foreign language entails comprehension and production. Comprehension involves cognitive process and de-codification of language substance whereas production entails language creativity and generation of thoughts and expressive values using language tools (Celce-Marico, 2001). One form of production is speaking which involves cognitive, physical and psychological processes (Hadley, 2001). Intuitively, the ultimate aim of most Saudi university students, studying intensive English courses, is to speak English fluently enabling them to conduct casual and careful interpersonal communication. Speaking English language is an accumulative skill which requires heavy language input in terms of language exposure, scaffolding, drilling, and classroom vivid interactivity and supportive effective environment (Patsy, Lightbown & Speada, 2011). Thus, Stephen Krashen's 1986 theory proposes that language is best learned through natural communication and speaking skill involves a silent period. Pedagogically, Saudi students have been taught English for nearly seven years in terms of schooling, but most of the students can hardly speak English quite well from day -to- day

interpersonal communication and classroom educational linguistic perspective. At College of Sciences and Arts –Dhahran Aljanoub, King Khalid University, the college's administration recommends conducting English club assisting students practice English language based on 'more practice more perfect'. As a result, English department has conducted an English club for two semesters. Furthermore, pedagogically, English teachers activate it aiming at grasping student's attention to civic global which involve argumentation, persuasion, tacit speaking skills and critical thinking. Furthermore, English teachers premise that English teachers is best strategy for providing students with appropriate time for practicing speaking and upgrading fluency rate among students (Brantmier, 2008).

The aim of this paper is to explore the advantages of conducting an English club at College of Art and Sciences –Dhahran Aljanoub. The study describes the processes of conducting the English club and the participatory aspect of the students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Saudi university students can hardly speak English well notwithstanding; they have learned English for nearly seven years. This problem is due to the lack of practicing English language in and out the classroom in regard to those students needs more English practice outside the classroom. Moreover, the teacher centered approach and lots of TTT (Teacher Talking Time) impede students' speaking skill. In addition, it makes English class tend to be humdrum and teacher centered based.

1.2 Research Questions

- How far does English club as free voluntary speaking activity with a low anxiety method assist Saudi university students practice English joyfully?
- How do Saudi university students improve their self-confidence when participating in English club?
- To what extent does English club activity provide Saudi university students with social environment which assists progressing self-confidence and colleague acquaintance?

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

- English club as free voluntary speaking activity with a low anxiety method assists Saudi university students practice English joyfully.
 - Saudi university students improve their self-confidence when participating in English club activity.
- English club provides Saudi university students with social environment which assists progressing self-confidence and colleague acquaintance.

1.4 Objectives of the Research

This study aims to:

1. Identify the advantages of activating English club in promoting speaking skill.
2. Raise university English teachers' awareness of the importance of using test based teaching strategy.
3. Highlight the importance of English club in promoting speaking skill and self-confidence in terms of performance.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings will hopefully assist English instructors and administration understand the importance of English club in promoting speaking skills among Saudi learners and creating a form of harmonic relationship and acquaintance among students.

1.6 Research Methodology

The instrument of data collection for the study was a questionnaire consisting of fifteen statements. The subjects were chosen purposively from College of Sciences and Arts –Dhahran Aljanoub, King Khalid University. The researcher conducted a pilot survey and used statistical techniques through which validity and reliability of the questionnaire were verified. The overall research method used was the descriptive analytic method.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The study was conducted in College of Sciences and Arts –Dhahran Aljanoub, King Khalid University. College of Sciences and Arts –Dhahran Aljanoub is currently composed of two sections, computer sciences and business section. The research was conducted in the academic year 2018 - 2019.

2- LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of English Club

An English club is an organization of people with a common purpose or interest, who meet regularly and take part in shared activities. Otherwise, it is a group or association of people with common aims or interests. (Marinova, Marshall, and Snow,2000). An English Club is a place for language learners to use English in a casual setting and it is in a spare classroom at an English school. After classroom hours, most schools remain open for an hour or two so that teachers can prepare for their classes. (Paltridge, 2001). The researchers in an English club paper illustrate that it is a group activity that occurs regularly. According to the researchers context, English club is conducted four times a week starting from Sunday to Wednesday for one hour. Its emphasis is to practice speaking English spontaneously and casually rather than the development of a strict set of English language skills. In the English club, students are engaged in hands-on fun activities in keeping with the overall team spirit. English club aims at helping the students develop a positive attitude towards the English language and to be sensitized to the speaking in English (Shrum andGlisan,2000). The aim of helping learners develop a positive attitude towards the English language is in line with Krashen's (1986) affective filter hypothesis. According to Krashen, learners can have a mental block towards a language caused by affective factors. The English club has strived to help learners avoid the mental block by engaging in fun communicative club-style activities in English. Through English clubs, learners develop an awareness of the English language communication, classroom instructions, and basic vocabulary. This awareness is designed to facilitate learning of English

language skills when learners begin formal instruction (Chase, 2002). English Clubs tend to be more fun when they are multigenerational and multicultural. English clubs are an alternative to traditional classes that focus on paper and pencil tasks and it is stress-free exposure to English with considering communicative value.

2.2 English Club Orientation and Objectives

Students are encouraged to take part in English club activities because they help students practice speaking and improve their communicative skills (Abott,2001). Thus, students must participate in the club at least twelve times each semester. ⁱCollege of Sciences and Arts –Dhahran Aljanoub’s administration grants certificates of club participation and achievements for each club member.

English club aims:

- To encourage students’ participation in English club;
- To give students practice speaking skill;
- To foster the current club’s continuity;
- To establish mutual care of activities between students and administration. (Hadley, 2001).

The effectiveness of English club activity entails the following activities:

- Discussing graded topics in English
- Individual presentation of particular topic in English
- Positive enthusiastic participation in club activities at least 80% from attendance and taking part perspective

2.3 English Club Advantages

An English Club is a place for students to use English in a fun environment and the students will have an opportunity to practice speaking skill based on real situations.

-Encouraging students to practice English authentically in terms of real life situational context

- Inculcating self confidence among students
- Broadening students’ communicative competence in terms of primary socialization process - Creating friendly social atmosphere among students (Carter and Nunan, 2001).

2.4 The principles of a successful English club

- Regular attendance must be regulated from Sunday to Wednesday
- Topics must be chosen in regard to ethical values and Saudi Arabia’s principles

-Functional language must be activated in the English club

- To create a relaxed environment for the students to practice English

- English language must be spoken by both teachers and students while conducting English clubⁱⁱ

- English club should be student –centered and English based in terms of communication.

- English club must be based on casual speech lacking immediate corrective feedback

-A good English club should be participant-centered.

-A good English club plays and important social role.

2.5 English Club at College of Sciences and Arts – Dhahran Aljanoub

Students are imposed to study an intensive English program which is taught in twelve hours per a week. The course is composed of three textbooksⁱⁱⁱ embodying three skills, listening, reading and writing. The program is based on separated different textbooks orientation from syllabus design perspective. Moreover, the textbooks of the program are linear form with no learners’ needs consideration; for instance, the textbook nominated as Well Read does not match the level of the students in terms of syllabus strands, vocabulary breadth and comprehensible learnability perspective. The duration of the program is two semesters, so students can study six books at two levels. The college’s administration sets its objectives relying on SMART technique to promote students’ level. As the result, the administration imposes starting an English club aiming at creating a realistic English literacy environment.

Accordingly, English department embarks preparing for the club by setting the objectives, materials, communicating students to inform them via texting them through cellphone messages , deciding the location , specifying the time, deciding the days, assigning the teachers, deciding the motto of the club and documenting.

After the preparation, the teachers started the club and the number of the students was so limited about 35 students out 260. By the end of the semester, the number of the students participating reached 165 students. The club starts from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. from Sunday to Wednesday. The topics discussed in the English club were graded from simple topics to complex topics such introducing yourself, talking about things you like to do and things you do not like to do, describing your town or city, life in village and city, driving so fast, a book you have read and other vivid topics. The discussed topics are selected carefully with high consideration to the ethical, social, political, religious, culture and intellectual security factor. In addition to the students' level, interests and motivation are considered from different perspectives.

3- METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The method used to conduct this study was the descriptive research and exploratory method. A student questionnaire was designed and used for data collection. The researchers used Microsoft Office Program, "Excel 2010", for analyzing the data.

3.2 Subjects

The population used in this study, was chosen randomly from the English language students at College of Art and Sciences –Dhahran Aljanoub, King Khalid University. It consisted of forty five students who majoring in management and computer sciences.

3.3 Instrument

The instrument, which was used as a data-collecting tool, was a questionnaire and the researchers' observation. The questionnaire included fifteen items in order to attain the objectives and the aims of the study.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

After the researchers designed the questionnaire, they conducted a pilot survey. Some modifications were made to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent through e-mail to a number of judges. The judges set many comments and corrections which are considered by the researchers. The judges were from Saudi Arabia universities and they confirmed that the questionnaire was valid and the items were accurate.

3.5 Procedure

The questionnaire was given by hand to the sample. They responded by putting a tick in the appropriate space opposite to an item in one of the following

choices: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. After that 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were summed up and 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' were summed up. The responses became only three columns: agree, neutral and disagree. These three responses were given values as 'excellent', 'v. good', and 'good'. The responses below 'good' were rejected. According to the scale, which was designed by the researchers, the general mean was (3.57).

4- DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, the collected data will be presented, analyzed, discussed and interpreted. The collected data were transformed into graphs and tables to facilitate interpretation.

4.1 Discussion of the findings

The items (1 to 5) tested students' tendency toward learning authentic English. The statements examined how the students are internally motivated to learn authentic English language instrumentally or from integrative perspective. The items (5 to 10) tested students' opinions about the importance of English club in improving their self-confidence and speaking skill. The items (11 to 15) examined the students' feeling toward the English club. These fifteen items converted into numbers and tables to facilitate analysis, discussion and interpretation as follows:

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table (4.2.1)

| | Frequency | Percent | Value |
|----------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Agree | 43 | 95.5 | 209 |
| Neutral | 1 | 2.2 | 3 |
| Disagree | 1 | 2.2 | 2 |

Table (4.2.1) shows that forty-three respondents (95.5) %agree on using authentic material connecting them with real life situation. One disagreed and another was neutral. These two respondents presented 4.5 % of the sample. This means that Saudi learners desire to learn authentic English language enabling them to communicate with the native speakers in real life context.

Table (4.2.2)

| | Frequency | Percent | Value |
|----------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Agree | 27 | 60.0 | 119 |
| Neutral | 6 | 13.3 | 18 |
| Disagree | 12 | 26.7 | 21 |

In table two (4.2.2), about 60% of the subjects were satisfied that English club as free voluntary speaking activity with a low anxiety method assists Saudi university students practice English joyfully. Twelve students were not satisfied and six of them were neutral.

Table (4.2.3)

| | Frequency | Percent | Value |
|----------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Agree | 25 | 55.6 | 103 |
| Neutral | 9 | 20.0 | 27 |
| Disagree | 11 | 24.4 | 11 |

Table (4.2.3) shows that forty subjects agree that Saudi university students improve their self-confidence when participating in English club activity. Two students were neutral and three teachers disagreed.

Table(4.2.4)

| | Frequency | Percent | Value |
|----------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Agree | 27 | 60.0 | 128 |
| Neutral | 6 | 13.3 | 18 |
| Disagree | 12 | 26.7 | 24 |

Table (4.2.4) shows that twenty-seven respondents (60.0%) agreed, six respondents (13.3%) were neutral, and twelve respondents (26.7%) disagreed that English club caters Saudi university students with social environment which assists progressing self-confidence and colleague acquaintance.

5- CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Based on data analysis, English club and test based teaching strategy foster Saudi university students promote their speaking skills. The study recommends that teachers need continuing pedagogical support and conducting the English club and test teaching based.

5.2 Findings

The study concludes that:

-Saudi university students are instrumentally motivated to learn authentic English language which coheres them with real life situations.

- English club assists Saudi students be free from language anxiety and traditional boring routine classroom activities and it helps them practice speaking English joyfully .

- English club enhances student –student engagement and teacher- student engagement. As the

result, self-confidence and self-esteem in terms of learning process increases among students.

-English club creates a form of familiar social environment which assists progressing self-confidence and colleague acquaintance.

- English club enhances speaking skill among students by progressing automatic language generation according to the situations.

-Test based teaching and English club fosters critical thinking , persuasive and argumentative skills among students.

5.3 Recommendations

In the light of these findings the researcher recommends that:

- English club should be scheduled as the essential course in the semester not as academic activity.
- Native speakers should conduct the English club in order to create realistic language context in terms of phonological aspect.
- English Club should conduct remedial classes concerning speaking strategies and skills which assist students communicate tactfully.
- Workshops should be conducted to evaluate this experience and to obtain new ideas which can develop English club.
- Oral presentations and seminars should be embodied in the English club in order to promote the academic skills of the students.
- Guest professor and academician should be invited to the English club to inspire students and motivate them for better future in terms of language proficiency.
- Presents and prizes should be given to the talented brilliant students in the English club.

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ⁱ *College of Sciences and Arts –Dhahran Aljanoub is one branch of King Khalid University and it has two sections, management and computer sciences. English is a major instruction medium in computer sciences section and most of the instructors are Indian who can hardly speak Arabic; hence, fostering speaking skill is a must and crucial.*

ⁱⁱ *Acquiring a language requires excessive language exposure via real life contact and aptitude regardless the age factor from critical period perspective. Moreover, personal disposition is a major factor to acquire language. The input factor, context and output aspect are inventible in acquiring language particularly second language in native context. (Birdsong, 1999)*

ⁱⁱⁱ *The textbooks are Open Forum which is designed to promote listening skill, Touch Stone which is based on communication development from communicative teaching approach perspective and Well Read which focuses on reading skills*