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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FLEX-IT! IN BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN COMMUNICATING IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is regarded as the most anxiety-inducing skill in language learning where most ESL learners tend to feel uncomfortable when speaking in the target language due to various reasons. This has led the students to develop low self-confidence when they are required to speak English. As a result, they have inadequate ability to communicate well in English which is believed to be one of the contributing factors to poor employability once they graduate from the tertiary institutions. Thus, Flex-It was designed to enhance the students' speaking skills in English and build confidence in expressing their ideas in the target language. Flex-It is a fun and interactive card game designed to provide the opportunity for ESL learners to construct and express their ideas creatively in the target language. This card game focuses on the use of common language functions in different situational contexts that are usually applied in real-life situations, i.e., outside of the classroom context. There are three different sets of cards, namely, one set of language function cards, one set of chance cards, and one set of situation cards. To stimulate the players' interest, the players were given two tokens for each correct expression used within one minute. The player who collects the most tokens and finishes their language function cards the fastest will be the winner. Through this game, it was discovered that the ESL learners were able to construct sentences based on the given situation by incorporating appropriate language functions. At the same time, they were also able to improve all the language skills needed and promote turn-taking skill among the players. To conclude, Flex-It is an interactive teaching tool which can be used to lower the learners' anxiety level and enhance their speaking ability when communicating in English.

Keywords: Speaking skill, Flex-It card game, ESL learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers have found that speaking is the most anxiety-inducing skill in language learning and the most conspicuous source of anxiety in the language classroom (Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2013). The complexity of the speaking process such as pronunciation, word recognition, meaning and grammar rules can be overwhelming for the learners to master all these processes (Fielding, 2007) which leads the learners to experience anxiety when they use the target language.

Hence, incorporating language games is a way to lower the anxiety that the students experience during the speaking activity which consequently lead to enhancing their proficiency and maximizing the experience of using the target language in real-life communication. However, there are a limited number of games that simulate the use of language functions. Language functions are expressions used for asking or giving opinion, expressing agreement or

disagreement, and making a preference, which are some of the common language structures that are applied in daily communication.

Many graduates still lack mastery of the language skills and perform poorly in class and outside the class. Their inadequate ability to communicate well in English is said to lead to poor employability (Yahaya et al., 2011) as most of them are unable to construct correct sentences nor pass on the message in a discussion. This further reiterates the importance of expressing correct and appropriate language functions and structures when communicating in English. Thus, through this card game, Flex-It, the students are exposed to meaningful activities which allow them to express their ideas creatively and confidently by using different language functions while learning in a fun way.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Population

The pilot study involved 31 third semester Diploma students from Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak Campus. These students were from different programmes such as Quantity Surveying, Sports Recreation and Computer Science. The study utilized purposive sampling based on the lecturer's observation on the students' performance in the classroom in determining their proficiency level.

2.2 Instrumentation

The study involved the use of Flex-It! card game and a set of questionnaires. Flex-It card game was designed by 4 lecturers from UiTM Sarawak Campus. Flex-It focuses on the use of common language functions in different situational contexts that are usually applied in daily conversation.

The questionnaire consists of 4 sections. The first section is the demographic section which has 4 questions based on gender, age, first language and current CGPA. The second section consists of 7 questions on students' anxiety when speaking in English that was adapted from Woodrow (2006). The third section has 13 questions on the effectiveness of the card game which was adapted from Sa'adan et al. (2019). Each item was answered with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The last section is an open-ended question on the students' suggestions to improve the card game.

2.3 Data Procedure

The respondents were required to play the game in the class under the lecturer's supervision. After playing the game, the respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire which was shared through Google Form.

2.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the collected data based on the numerical data gathered from the Google Form results. Data collected was extracted and analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

3. FINDINGS

The total acceptance mean of students' perceptions of studying English speaking skills via Flex-It is 46.37 which is nearing to 50% positivism (N: Strongly Agree, Agree) that covers being more confident (mean=43.55, sd:20.53), creating awareness (mean=45.16, sd:22.81), promoting fun learning (mean=48.39, sd:9.12) and interesting speaking lessons (mean=48.39, sd:9.12). With N as 2, the Pearson Correlation of the study is -0.9534625892. The strongest relationship is one with a correlation of -1, which denotes a nearly perfect relationship along a straight line. Therefore, the minus sign shows that the downward line slopes address that there is a negative relationship. To prove this, the study also employed Degree of Freedom (DF) and Error Function (ERF) which resulted in no error (n=0).

All four elements of being confident, creating awareness, promoting fun learning, and interesting speaking lessons are intertwined. This has further supported the claim by Wilson-Fleming and Wilson Younger (2012) in which it could be seen that positive learning environment is essential for students to enhance their ability to learn and be productive in and out of the classroom.

A disruption of one of the elements has led to negative relationship as represented by the Pearson Correlation of -0.9534625892. To illustrate, students who have lost their confidence to speak in English via Flex-It, would pessimistically influence their tendency to create awareness on the importance of speaking English, unable to promote fun in speaking English and fail to participate fully in establishing interesting speaking lessons.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of Flex-It has increased the students' confidence level by speaking up through the usage of the language functions correctly in the subsequent game rounds. This study further reiterates the effectiveness of using games to lower the students' speaking anxiety and provide a positive environment that maximizes the students' learning experience.

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