INCORPORATING PEER RECORDING IN BLENDED LEARNING EXECUTION FOR LOW PROFICIENCY ENGLISH LEARNERS: PRACTICE FOR ROLE-PLAY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Blended learning has been significantly applied in most courses and subjects offered in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions including Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Malaysia. One of the 21st century teaching and learning method practised is peer recording with the involvement of social networking site for role play preparation. Since these low English proficiency students are currently struggling to practise the language, peer recording is expected to assist them in role play preparation. However, the effectiveness of peer recording is dubious as the recording is produced without the presence of the lecturers. Therefore, this study investigates the effectiveness of using peer recording as a technique in practising for role play assessment, while supporting the execution of blended learning among low proficiency English learners. A qualitative approach was used to obtain the data, which is open-ended question interview. This study used purposive sampling involving 11 Pre-Diploma (UiTM) who are required to upload their role play practice videos on class Facebook Group for their peers to comment. They were interviewed by using the open-ended questions to gain their explanation on their confidence and fluency improvement after practising using peer recording technique. Data collected were analysed by using content analysis. The comparison of marks for role play practice (peer recording) and role play (assessment) was also carried out to obtain remarkable difference of those two. Findings have shown great improvement in terms of students' confidence (80%) and fluency (50%) for role play assessment.

Keywords: peer recording, blended learning, low proficiency English learners, role play assessment

1.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Teaching English as a second language requires various efforts and techniques especially when dealing with low proficiency English learners. Teachers are expected to apply effective method in facilitating students at this level. As studied by Mat (2014), students at low English proficiency are mostly influenced by their attitudes and motivation towards learning the language. However, as this study concerns, student's low English proficiency has also affected one's attitude and motivation in learning the language. They refuse to speak and use the language in public as they are not confident with their proficiency.

In Malaysia, majority of university students have attended formal English education for at least 11 years starting from Standard 1 in primary school until Form 5 in secondary school. Nevertheless, the low English proficiency issue is still relevant to be discussed. Many low proficiency English learners in ESL

classroom have failed to acknowledge their abilities in using English. This is mainly caused by lack of practice in using the language. Khodadady and Ashrafborji (2013) highlighted that students may not have recognised that they are supposed to speak English or at least use the opportunity given wisely to use the language as an outcome of their previous English education.

Peer recording is a technique where students are supposed to have their voice and action recorded by their friends. This is inspired by a technique introduced by Schneider (1993) called pair taping where it focuses on building students' fluency and confidence when speaking English. In pair taping, students are supposed to record themselves speaking freely in pairs. The starting of pair taping back in 1993 required students to record their voice in laboratory and save them in cassettes, later submitted them to their lecturers as the evidence of practice. Thus, pair taping and peer recording are upholding the same basic concept but differ when it comes to the execution.

1.1 Problem Statement

Low English proficiency students are currently struggling to practise the language skills especially speaking. Since the execution of blended learning, peer recording with the involvement of social networking site (Facebook) is introduced to the students in this study as one of the techniques to prepare them for role play assessment. However, the effectiveness of peer recording is dubious as the recording is produced without the presence of the lecturers.

1.2 Research Objectives & Research Questions

This study focuses on investigating the effectiveness of utilising peer recording technique as one of the initiatives to boost low proficiency English learners' confidence and fluency for their role-play assessment. The emergence of new technology allows students to do more than just recording their voice. Hence, peer recording where both action and voice recorded is applied. Students are supposed to use this technique during Blended Learning session (Week 4), prior to their Role Play assessment in Week 6. As the session is conducted online, they are supposed to have the practice session recorded and post it on class Facebook Group. Therefore, the students can fully utilise the blended learning session prepared for them. Thus, the objectives of the study are;
    i.   To investigate the effectiveness of peer recording as a practice for low proficiency English learners' role play assessment (confidence).
    ii. To investigate the effectiveness of peer recording as a practice for low proficiency English learners' role play assessment (fluency).
In brief, this study is conducted to answer two research questions which are;
    i.   How do low proficiency English learners benefit from peer recording as a practice for their role play assessment (confidence)?
    ii. How do low proficiency English learners benefit from peer recording as a practice for their role play assessment (fluency)?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Pair taping technique introduced by Schneider (1993) has been widely used by educators in helping their non-native English learners in practising fluency. This includes students who learn English as a second language (ESL), and English as a foreign language (EFL). This technique leaves significant influence for the study as it applies the same basic elements of pair taping, which is the voice recording activity. However, this study adds another element; the recording of both voice and action for the speaking activity based on a given situation.

2.1 Peer Recording

The feasibility of Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA) has provided great influence in the teaching and learning of English. A research conducted by Sun and Yang (2015), presented positive outcomes enjoyed by a group of EFL students in China where they recorded their speaking activities and uploaded on Facebook community. The videos then documented comments and suggestions from international students and their local peers which helped them enhancing their speaking related skills especially their confidence in speaking English. Similarly, in Iran, a study conducted by Tarighat and Kodabakhsh (2016) where they used a social networking application (Whatsapp) to share their students' recording of a two-minute speech to welcome comments from their peers.

As the previous studies proved the effectiveness of Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA), this study has chosen peer recording as a technique to build students' confidence and fluency prior to a role play assessment. Peer recording brings the initiative of students who help and to be helped by their peers to record their speaking activities. The recording then was supposed to be made visible to other classmates to enable them to give constructive comments on it. Thus, social networking site (Facebook) is used to share the recording.

2.2 Blended Learning

Blended learning is a combination of traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with computer-mediated instruction. Students and lecturers should be well-equipped with computerised devices and internet connection to be able to carry out blended learning session. O'Byrne and Pytash (2015) listed two more terms that are interchangeably used with blended learning namely hybrid learning and mixed-mode learning. Nonetheless, in Malaysia, the term blended learning is used most often.

For ELC030 (English for Pre-Diploma Students) subject, students and lecturers are supposed to fulfil 4 sessions of blended learning in Week 4, Week 8, Week 11 and Week 13, out of 14 weeks of lecture. Since blended learning is listed as the compulsory session in ELC030 syllabus, this study focuses on Blended Learning 1 (Week 4), as it is meant for Role Play practice.

2.3 Low Proficiency English Learners

Executing the new method of teaching and learning is an unexplainable challenge faced by the lecturers and students, let alone the low proficiency English learners. Low Proficiency English Learners are often trapped in their own negative perceptions especially when they are required to speak English. They are afraid of their classmates' judgement on their English-speaking abilities and proficiency which resulted in discouragement for them to speak the language. This statement is supported by Kubo (2009) which explained how lower level English speakers feel self-conscious when speaking English as their classmates will lower down their voice and start focusing on these low proficient speakers' words.

In UiTM Malaysia, Pre-Diploma students are classified as low proficiency English learners as their range for English grade for *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) are from C and below as extracted from *Syarat Kelayakan dan Syarat Khas Program Mengubah Destini Anak Bangsa*, UiTM (2018).

Even though these students are categorised as the low proficiency English Learners, all of them are computer and information technology literate. Therefore, purposive sampling technique is used to identify reliable samples as explained in methodology section.

This study also admires the delightful outcomes yielded by the research completed by Sun, Lin, You, Shen, Qi and Luo (2017) where their EFL students managed to improve their speaking skills especially in terms of accuracy and pronunciation with the help of social networking sites and mobile learning.

2.4 Role Play Assessment

Role play assessment in an ESL classroom requires the students to act out a situation based on their creativity and syllabus' needs. According to Dorathy and Mahalakshmi (2011) role play is believed to be among the best methods that can be practised by ESL learners to improve their speaking and interaction skills. By practising role play, low proficient learners can improve gradually as the difficulty levels of the given situations are also increased progressively.

In completing ELC030 (English for Pre-Diploma Students) subject, students are supposed to fulfil Role play assessment (20%) out of 100% of their continuous assessment (ELC030 Test Specifications, APB, UiTM, 2017). Since this subject has no final examination, students must score good marks for all assessment including role play which is the focus of this study.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative approach design which is the open-ended question interview. The data were then analysed by using content analysis. Bengtsson (2016) stated that content analysis can be applied on all types of written texts, and the researchers are free from any specific rules. This involves making sense of qualitative materials to identify the effectiveness of using peer recording as a technique preparing students for their role play assessment.

3.2 Research Samples

Purposive sampling method is used in conducting this study. There were 11 Pre-Diploma students from UiTM Cawangan Johor, Kampus Segamat, Malaysia who were taking English for Pre-Diploma (ELC030) subject. Generally, this group of students has low English proficiency as the grades obtained for English in *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* is from C and below. The samples were purposely selected as this study investigated the effectiveness of incorporating peer recording for blended learning week as a technique for low proficiency English learners preparing for their role play assessments.

3.3 Research Procedure

In Week 4 (Blended Learning Week), prior to Role Play assessment in Week 6, the 11 selected students were asked to record their role play practice based on a situation given by the lecturer. The role play was conducted in pair. Then, they uploaded the video on class Facebook Group created by the lecturer. Once the videos were visible to all viewers (Facebook Group members), they were supposed to leave their constructive comments to help their friends to improve. Meanwhile, lecturers awarded marks based on provided rubrics. The video owners responded to the comments by improving their role play respectively. Lecturers also compared and analysed their role play marks (peer recording) and role play marks (assessment). After the students had undergone the process; the open-ended question interview was

conducted probing on their experience in executing peer recording. The data were coded and analysed using content analysis approach.

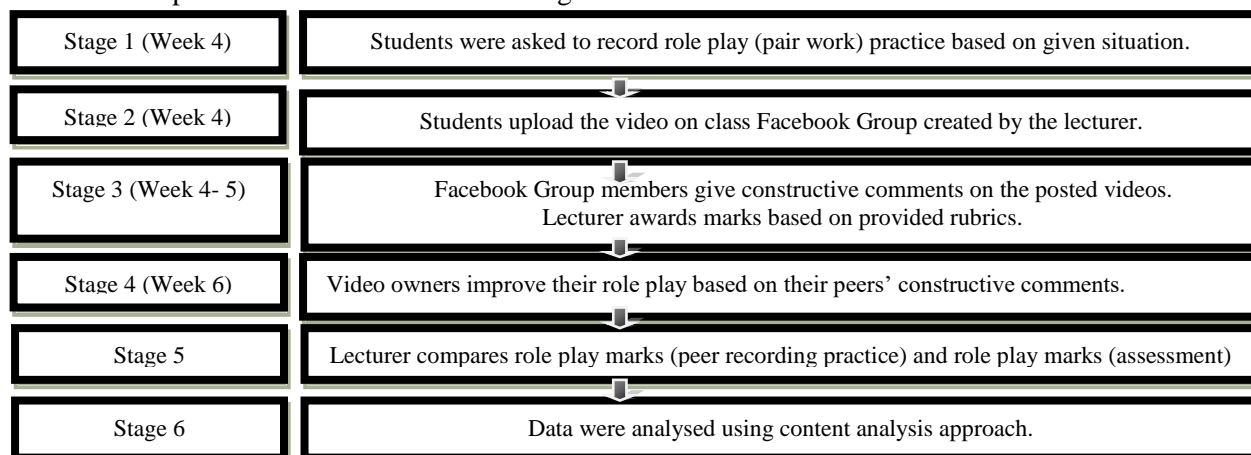The research procedure is illustrated in the diagram below:

Stage 1 (Week 4)	Students were asked to record role play (pair work) practice based on given situation.
Stage 2 (Week 4)	Students upload the video on class Facebook Group created by the lecturer.
Stage 3 (Week 4- 5)	Facebook Group members give constructive comments on the posted videos. Lecturer awards marks based on provided rubrics.
Stage 4 (Week 6)	Video owners improve their role play based on their peers' constructive comments.
Stage 5	Lecturer compares role play marks (peer recording practice) and role play marks (assessment)
Stage 6	Data were analysed using content analysis approach.

Figure 1. Research Procedure

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are discussed based on two research questions;

4.1 How do low proficiency English learners benefit from peer recording as a practice for their role play assessment (confidence)? (RQ1)

Out of 11 students, 9 of them stated that their confidence in speaking especially in doing the role play have positively spirited as the result of peer recording practice. They managed to build their confidence as their peers who commented on class Facebook Group gave constructive comments and they did not pointed out their friends' weaknesses negatively. Other than that, they were also motivated to perform better as they can repeatedly witness their own mistakes during the practice.

As for the marks, 80% of them show improvement where they obtained only 1 out of 4 for Communicative Ability (based on role play assessment rubric) for peer recording practice, while for role play assessment, they obtained 3 to 4.

4.2 How do low proficiency English learners benefit from peer recording as a practice for their role play assessment (fluency)? (RQ2)

For fluency, out of 11 students, 6 of them stated that their fluency has also improved after the peer recording practice. They took the constructive comments left by the Facebook Group members as tips and motivations to improve their fluency. In addition, the recorded role play practice allows them to repeatedly analyse and reflect their weaknesses that lead to their fluency improvement.

There is also an improvement shown by the marks where 50% of them scored 5 to 6 out of 8 for Language (based on role play assessment rubric) for role play assessment, compared to only 3 to 4 for peer recording practice.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

In conclusion, low proficiency English learners have amazingly benefited from peer recording technique conducted in Blended Learning Week as a form of practice prior to their Role Play assessment. They have shown incredible improvement in terms of their confidence and fluency in completing the role play assessment. Other than that, blended learning session assigned to ELC030 subject was fully utilised by the students and lecturers. For future research, it is recommended to use this procedure to investigate its effectiveness on other oral assessments.

Acknowledgement

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