LET’S TALK AND LET’S GO GLOBAL: ANALYSING STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the secondary school students’ perception of the implementation of Let’s Talk Let’s Go Global program, an English communicative program initiated by the Ministry of Education and executed by six Universiti Malaysia Terengganu language instructors. A total of 260 Form Four students from 13 secondary schools participated in the program for a duration of 6 months. A semi-structured interview was performed to determine the students’ perception and opinions about the program. The findings reveal that Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program was effective in enhancing the students’ English communications. This paper also proposes some recommendations for improvement in terms of the content, assessment and organization of the program in the future.

Field of Research: English communicative program, students’ English communication

Introduction

It is important for everybody especially the non-native speakers of English to have good communication skills in English. English is taught as second language in Malaysia and due to the fact that English has turned into a basic requirement for all especially students to gain information, diplomacy and entertainment among other things, teachers play crucial roles in school. After completing school and tertiary level education, jobseekers have realised the importance of acquiring the skill of English communication in order to be accepted in today’s world of globalized era of borderless information and technology (Zubaidah Awang & Shaidatul Akma, 2008).

However, according to Hashemi (2011) students in general are not performing well in English language learning in any countries in the world, particularly when English is not their first language. He also claimed that the students’ weaknesses in English communication may occur due to a different social and cultural environment where the native language is only accepted and used in the society. In addition to that, some of the factors that contribute to the problems of communicating in English in schools are amount of students in a class, school resources, teachers’ quality and also the students’ school attendance (John and Ehow, 2011).

Due to that, effective teaching methods and resources have to be taken much emphasis in creating student-centered learning environment that will ‘promote active participation of students in classrooms activities’ (Koros, Indoshi & Okwach, 2013).

The ever growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world, as millions of people today
want to improve their command of English or ensure that their children achieve a good command of English. The worldwide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources (Richards, 2006: 5).

Stemmed from a continuous concern over receiving first year students with weak performance in English language in terms of writing and speaking in universities and in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu in particular, a program filled with communicative activities in class assisted with the use of social media for enhancing the students’ communication skills in English was launched. It was hoped that the intended participants of the program would be willing to communicate in English given appropriate stimulus in order to facilitate them to enhance their communication skill in English. Based on a previous research conducted in New Zealand university-based private school on a group of international students where English is not their first language, their willingness to communicate in English is influenced by the topics discussed, their cultural background, the size of group they are communicating with, self–confidence, interlocutor’s participation and also the medium of communication (Cameron, 2013).

Background of the Program

Recognising the problems faced by teachers and students in schools in their effort to improve the students’ English communication, this program was introduced. Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global Program was an English language communicative program, focusing on facilitating Form 4 secondary students to speak better in English. This program was initially proposed by the Minister of Education II, Dato’ Seri Idris bin Jusoh to Universiti Malaysia Terengganu in May 2013 and it became the first collaborative program between a higher education institution and schools after the merge of Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. 13 secondary schools around the district of Kuala Terengganu were involved in this program and 20 students were selected from each school. The selection of the students was determined by its respective school.

Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global Program was conducted for 6 months starting from 6th of July 2013 until 21st of December 2013 with a total of 12 meetings. The classes were held in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu every fortnight on Saturdays for two hours. The objectives for having the classes in UMT are to give exposure to the secondary school students to University life and at the same time to motivate them to succeed in their studies in order to further their education to tertiary level. There were only 20 students per class facilitated by an instructor. Six English instructors from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu were responsible for this program and their roles were to facilitate and guide the students to communicate better in English.

This program was conducted and categorized into three different components which are class meetings, Facebook interactions and also Let’s Talk radio talk program on Terengganu FM. Therefore, other than just attending classes for a total of 12 meetings within six months, all 260 students were encouraged to participate in the interactive communication in the Let’s talk and Let’s Go Global Program’s Facebook group where they could put in their comments and chat with their schoolmates or new friends from other schools. In the meantime, they could also test their telephone conversation skills by calling Terengganu FM during Let’s Talk segment every Saturday at 12pm for 1 hour.

In order to investigate the relevance and effectiveness of the program, pre and post test and observation were also conducted to the students. In both pre and post tests, each student was tested...
up upon his and her ability to deliver a spontaneous speech where the topic was picked from the same ten prepared topics. However, the findings of these surveys were not discussed in detail in this paper.

Methodology

In this paper, we focused on the perception of the students who were involved in this program. Research methodology of semi-structured interview was adopted. According to Drever (1995), ‘semi-structured interview provides an extremely flexible technique for small-scale research’ (cited in Pathak & Intratat, 2012). On the last day of the program, five students were randomly chosen and were posed with seven interview questions. The following questions were asked to the students:

1. Did you enjoy Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global Program?
2. Do you think this program is beneficial? Why?
3. How Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program has helped you in enhancing your communication in English?
4. Is there any activity/task that you enjoyed in this program?
5. Do you think Facebook interaction helps you to improve in speaking English?
6. What have you learned from Let’s talk and Let’s Go Global Program?
7. Do you think this program should be continued in the future? If yes, do you have any suggestions on how it can be improved?

The students’ responses were supported by the findings from pre test and post test and also observation made by the instructors where the complete findings of these analyses were reported elsewhere. The format of the questions was open and the students were encouraged to elaborate on their responses. All five students were non-native speakers of English and throughout the semi-structured interview, they were assisted with English vocabulary when they were facing difficulties to explain.

Findings and Discussion

Due to the fact that this program focused on enhancing the students’ communication skills, many speaking activities and social media interaction were conducted throughout the program. When they were asked on whether they enjoyed the program the program and the efficacy of it in enhancing their communication skills, all five students stated that Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program gave them benefits in terms of their ability to speak freely in English without putting too much emphasis on what others might think about their English proficiency and they enjoyed the program.

I enjoy speaking English in this class. I usually am shy but not here. I can just say anything I want because my friends here try to speak English too. In school, when we try to speak in English, people give us that sarcastic look. I remember what the UMT International student from Sudan during the Culture Talk seminar said in class. He stated that we shouldn’t be afraid and shy to speak in English because English is not our mother tongue. I like it. It encourages me to speak more in English.

(Respondent #3)

The students’ opinions can be supported by the finding from the program’s pre and post tests in the graph below where 34.4% of the 260 participants of the program managed to speak fluently during the post test compared to only 12.3% of them for pre test.
In investigating students’ perception and interest in the planned activities where all of them are communicative and interactive in pairs or groups throughout the program for six months, the respondents for this semi-structured interview had different views.

I really enjoyed Cyber Chef, the cooking activity. Together with my group members, we prepared egg and tuna sandwiches. While doing them, we explained to the audience in the class about the ingredients that we used. It was fun. In school, we never do activities like this.

(Respondent #1)

Drama competition is what I like best. My school friends and I worked together for many months where we had to prepare the script, prepare the props, practice acting and others. It was difficult at first because some of us are very shy, but after practicing many times, our drama turned out pretty good.

(Respondent #4)

The students were able to communicate in English while getting involved in activities. According to MacIntyre and Doucette (2010), ‘the willingness to communicate is seen as the learners’ readiness to speak the second language at a specific time to a particular person. It is then conceptualized as the final psychological level to the initiation of second language communication’ (Cited in Cameron, 2013). After six months of the program, the students were willing to communicate in English when given any task by the instructors.

To ensure the efficacy and relevance of this program to students, all five respondents thought that Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global should be continued in the future for other students to experience it too. Two of the respondents suggested more interactive activities to be included in the class activities and also asked for a longer duration of the program.

I think it should be continued because it can help other students too. They will have the opportunity to do activities that we did like Magic Box, My Lyric and Culture Sharing. I am now feel confident to speak in English with my ETA (English Teaching Assistant), Miss Joanna who is from the US in my school. I suggest more interesting and fun activities can be added in the program.
The students claimed that by having programs like Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program that emphasized on communication skills in English, they will be able to speak more confidently in the future. This data can be supported by the study conducted by Arslan and Akbarov (2012) that learners of English as second language believe that the ability to speak in English will be beneficial in obtaining information, meeting foreigners and most importantly, getting future jobs. They also stated that they have learned many ways other than reading and completing grammar exercises to improve their English proficiency such as listening and singing to English songs.

Conclusion

It is found that through this semi-structured interview, the students thought that Let’s Talk and Let Go Global program was interactive, fun and also taught them many aspects in life such as teamwork and moral values. Programs like this are beneficial in enhancing students’ communication skills and at the same time, their level of confidence when speaking in front of a large audience can be increased. Let’s Talk and Let’s Go Global program provided the students the platform to speak English with ease as they face difficulties of doing so in school due to anxiety and class size. Their ability to speak in English is improved may due to a small number of students in class and therefore, it was an advantage for the instructors to facilitate the students in any way possible. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights on future English communicative programs that aim to assist students both in secondary schools or tertiary level to improve their English learning skills especially speaking.

References


