THE USE OF MIND MAPPING STRATEGY TO IMPROVE SPEAKING COMPETENCY AMONG EFL PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

*1 Ansar AlWadi, 2 Nur Salina Ismail

1 Master Candidate in English Language Studies, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu.
2 Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu.

*Corresponding author: ansar.alwadi2012@gmail.com

Received: 25 February 2019, Accepted: 28 May 2019

ABSTRACT

The goal of learning the English language is the ability to communicate in the language. Thus, teaching and learning of speaking is an indisputable requirement in the English Language as a foreign language classroom. However, EFL students have problems with spoken English, may be as a result of poor motivation to speak the language, language anxiety, or lack of effective teaching and learning strategies. In order to broaden the understanding of the way to improve speaking competency among EFL students, this conceptual paper attempts to examine the application of the mind mapping strategy to improve speaking competency among EFL primary school students through a critical analysis of the related literature by addressing the following research questions; what are the problems and difficulties that EFL students face while they are speaking in the classroom? And to what extent does the use of mind mapping strategy help to improve EFL students’ speaking skills in the classroom? Based on embedding theories and previous studies concerning the use of mind mapping strategy in speaking activities, this paper offers great practical guidance on the contextualization of the mind mapping strategy and recommendations for its future as an effective strategy to improve speaking’ competency in the classroom.

Keywords: Speaking skill, Foreign language classrooms, Mind mapping, Mind Mapping Strategy, EFL


1.0 INTRODUCTION

English is the most globally language used in teaching learning foreign languages while in some contexts is used to a medium of instruction in teaching other languages (Alzubaidi, Aldridge, & Khine, 2016). Accordingly, English language acts as an important role in communicating and learning between all cultures all over the world. Basically, it is the language that is used to achieve the true purpose of language, which is to communicate. Alego
and Butcher (2013) asserted that the purpose of language is to communicate, whether with others by talking and writing or with ourselves by thinking.

On the other hand, experts assume that most learners figure out how to understand and speak English before they comprehend how to write and read the language. Thus, the spoken English is usually learned first and later followed by other skills like reading and writing skills. Be that as it may, the ability to communicate orally is equal to knowing the given language since speaking is the main means of human communication (Farabi, Hassanvand, & Gorjjan, 2017).

Egan (1999) argues that among the four language skills, speaking skill is at the heart of second and foreign language learning. Actually it is the essential skill of communication and very intricate in nature as it does not only rely on the ability to speak but also includes other varying components such as the process of communicative competence, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary progressing (Fulcher, 2014).

Despite that, in a review the status of English language as a foreign language in speaking, it has been noticed that EFL students face many difficulties while they are speaking the foreign language. Even if they do speak the foreign language said, they would be unable to have a real communication. Thus, they cannot achieve the target of the language. Instead, they would look confused, restricted, hesitant, and bored. These EFL students, sometimes, have opinions, thoughts, ideas, or even needs, but they often do not have the ability to deliver them through a meaningful and effective conversation (Afshar, & Asakereh, 2016).

Consequently, challenges in EFL instruction may be as a result of many cultural and environmental factors, such as the lack of interactive speaking environments, emphasis placed on test scores, and foreign language anxiety (Yen, Hou, & Chang, 2015). Batiha, Noor, and Mustaffa, (2018) construe that the major problem of Jordanian EFL students (as an example of EFL country) is as result of speaking anxiety, lack of confidence to speak English, and inadequacies in the teaching and learning speaking practices. Most studies assert that anxiety is the most provoking factor among the language skills. Henceforth, the present study intends to employ mind mapping strategies in teaching EFL students speaking skills.

By reviewing numerous studies on EFL curriculum and how mind mapping is being used in teaching and learning language, the researcher finds that mind mapping is almost always applied in writing activity while its application in speaking activity is rather limited. The reason for that instance could be because of the difficult nature of the speaking skill (Alaraj, 2017). Likewise, Fajarwati and Latif (2017) asserts that speaking in English is the toughest, problematic, and neglected skill to be learnt by EFL students as evidences indicate that most of EFL students entering university possess lack mastery to speak in English language confidently and proficiently.

In light of the above discussions, this paper aims to achieve two main objectives. The first one attempts to explore the difficulties and problems that the EFL students face while they are speaking in the classroom. The second one attempts to examine the use of mind mapping strategy in speaking lessons. By doing this, this paper plans to illustrate the relationship between mind mapping strategy and speaking skill.
1.1 Defining Speaking Skill

Lim (2017) argues that speaking is not merely producing and pronouncing words, but it is actually an interactive productive process, which involves receiving, constructing, and conveying meanings embedded in spoken words. Similarly, some scholars regard speaking as the most important skill that the students can acquire and assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, 2011). On the other hand, Murica (2001) argues that speaking is a complex skill, which should be taught everywhere.

Hence, the majority of the literature concerning the speaking skill, directly or indirectly, asserted that the efficient spoken communication (speaking skill) is the ability to deliver the views and thoughts confidently, interactively, meaningfully, and clearly with free flow words (Varma 2013; Harmer 2007).

Meanwhile in communicative approach, the student needs communicative competence as linguistic competence involves being able to use the language appropriately in real-life communication (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, 2011). By this, the necessity of this approach is its contribution to students’ motivation to reach the target language since this approach is based on making real, meaningful, and purposeful communication and interaction.

On this basis, the mastery to speak English language is a priority for EFL students to reach the target language and overcome many difficulties in speaking (Richard, 2008). As a result, practicing to speak frequently in daily life, making a motivational environment, interacting between the students with the classroom activities, and acquiring speaking learning from the primary stage since it requires a long time will enhance EFL students’ speaking proficiency to reach the target language (Scrivener 2005; Kusnierek 2015; & Morrow, 2018).

The previous study by Alaraj (2017) show that the most dominant difficulties students face on their way of acquiring EFL speaking skill are lack of lexis, lack practising, and psychological problems. Moreover, this study proves that using strategies to improve speaking skill have a positive effect on students' speaking fluency.

Therefore, it can be seen that the main influential problems on the EFL students’ speaking competency are the psychological feelings and the lack of motivated strategies. Thus, EFL students cannot speak English fluently.

1.2 Defining Mind Mapping Strategy

There are many definitions and conceptualizations of mind mapping. Actually it is a kind of node and link diagram highly recommended for use in the classroom by scholars (Buzan, 2006; Smith & Call, 2001; Rafii, 2017; van der Veen, van der Wilt, & Boerma, 2018). In fact, a mind map is a graphic design which constructs upon a visual form or diagram of note taking instead of traditional note taking way by making connections between concepts (Novak & Canas, 2010). It is the comfortable and simplest way to put ideas into the brain and to take the ideas out of the brain.

Based on those features of a mind map, it can be concluded that this nonlinear learning strategy is one of the greatest assessment methods for teaching learning process as a mean to
support student critical thinking (Pudelko, 2012). On the other hand, Goldberg (2004) argues that mind map is an effective way to introduce an overall topic, increase students’ involvement, and get thoughts down quickly. By this, mind mapping is a powerful tool to help students overcome problems with the organization of their ideas and thoughts (McGriff, 2007).

Actually introducing EFL students to mind maps was prompted by a need to explore the claims promoting the use of such diagrams to teaching practitioners (Buzan, 2000). As mostly used in action research, mind mapping strategy is backed by other related theories. In the present paper, four theories are embedded; three are based on visual information-processing model and scaffolding theory.

The literature illustrates that the rationale for embedding the three visual information-processing models (dual coding theory, visual argument hypothesis and conjoint retention hypothesis) which are based on the claim that these theories are concerned with how graphical representations contribute to learning (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006; Vekiri, 2002; Sadoski, & Paivio, 2013; Sadoski, & Krasny, 2018). Secondly, these theories are associated with mind mapping in particular node and link diagram in general. According to Merchie and Keer (2016) these theories are theoretically underpinning the use of working with graphic organizers or maps.

Theoretically, the Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991) and the Conjoint Retention Hypothesis (Robinson & Molina, 2002) underpin the use of working with graphic organizers or maps. Both theories are extensively discussed by Vekiri (2002) and Nesbit and Adesope (2006), thus emphasize the importance of conjointly encoding information both non-verbally or spatially and verbally.

Scaffolding is embedded in this framework as there is need to train the students on how to use the mind mapping strategy in the English speaking class. The concept of scaffolding has been used to explain the effectiveness of learning from pictures combined with speech or text (Mayer, 2008) and could be implicated in learning with mind mapping strategy, as their form integrate both textual and spatial elements.

2.0 DISCUSSION

Based on the above arguments, mind mapping, seen as an off shot of graphical representations. It can be useful in exploiting visual perception systems to show and explore relationships between concepts more efficiently than sentential text, and can provide support for complex tasks by acting as an external extension of memory.
2.1 The Uses of Mind Mapping Strategy in Speaking Activities

Although the literature on concept mind mapping has been mostly concerned with its application in writing and reading skills, its advantages in speaking skill has been recently explored. Mind mapping can be used in many activities, such as mind mapping to communicate and make presentations, plan family activity, start new efforts and ways to summarize the contents of a book (Buzan, 2006). Petri (2001) asserts that there are variety of mind mappings in education such as the image tool, hypertext design tool, presentation tool, learning tool, and helpful tool.

As a proper and effective strategy in both situations before essay writing and during essay writing, mind mapping was used by Vijayavalsalan (2016) in enhancing writing skill among EFL students. Correspondingly, examining its impact on reading comprehension ability, Siriphanich and Laohawiriyanon (2010) in their study showed that, after teaching mind mapping techniques, the majority of the EFL students had improved their reading ability which emphasizes its effectiveness in improving language skills.

On the other hand, the recent interests in the application of the mind mapping strategy in speaking skill have been increased. Thus, new studies have been emerged in examining the benefits of a mind map as a powerful method to improve speaking competency among EFL students. Here, three recent studies have been critically reviewed that investigates the using of mind mapping strategy in speaking skill: Susilawati (2018), Mirza (2016), and Anggraeni (2014). However, these studies are still limited, which suggests the need for more studies to examine the relationship between mind mapping and its impact in improving speaking skill.

Susilawati (2018) examined 59 students at the eighth grade of SMPN30 Muaro Jambi who were distributed into three classes in order to find out the effect of using mind mapping technique on students’ speaking skill. The researcher found that the students’ speaking skill
has improved with regards to grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. The study has been concluded that mind mapping strategy allows EFL students to be more creative and active in sharing their thoughts by speaking English language. These findings suggest that mind mapping can be used by English teacher and EFL students as an effective method in teaching and learning speaking.

Mirza (2016) employed quasi experimental research in order to find out whether mind mapping improves students’ speaking ability or not and to find out how does mind mapping strategy improves students’ speaking ability. The study involved class 1a and 1b of MAS Darul Ihsan. In order to obtain the required data, the researcher gave the students pre-test and post-test. Thus, by using T test and degree of freedom 48 at significant level of α=0.05 showed that the gained score was 6.23. As T test was higher than table 6.23 > 1.68, Ha of this research was agreeable.

Finally, the researcher found that mind mapping strategy is one of strategies which can be used in order to improve the students’ speaking competency. Moreover, the students recognized that mind mapping helped them to improve their speaking competence, and they believed that mind mapping strategy encourages them to generate thought. Before the students used mind mapping, they recognized speaking as difficult especially in generating the thoughts and ideas. Usually, mind mapping uses the picture to replace the central topic, the picture helps students to think better and to limit a topic, so then it makes them easier to develop the idea. By this, their speaking will be fluent and systematic.

Anggraeni (2014) in his study, 52 students are chosen as a sample; the first year students of SMPN 4 Bandar Lampung. They were divided into two groups, each included 26 students. One class became the experimental, while the other one became the control group. The students were dealt and taught in different methods, that was mind mapping given to the experimental group while the control group taught by traditional teaching. The used instrument was the test of speaking. This study revealed that adopting a strategy of mind mapping strategy could significantly improve the students’ speaking ability because it was backed by colors and pictures, and was effective more than that the traditional method of teaching.

The findings of Susilawati (2018), Mirza (2016), and Anggraeni (2014) studies which have been highlighted, analysing the issues of spoken language English in this context as well as addressing the issues of learning English as second or foreign language using mind mapping strategy as the purpose of this study. Briefly, mind mapping is relatively proper and effective strategy to improve speaking skill among EFL students. It can be encouraged highly to the students to speak fluently and confidently.

A mind map comprises a flexible graphic diagram which is used to capture and organize the ideas visually through brainstorming and talking around the related topic. In other words, presenting the ideas in a graphic method to organize information and gain a new understanding of the environment around them (Deppeler, 1992). The mind mapping strategy can be used to express a wide range of new ideas fluently and show interrelationships between concepts and content in a very visual and nonlinear structure (Ruffini, 2008). The recent study demonstrates that mind mapping is the most effective method to enter, store, and retrieve data from or to the brain as it draws in the format that is similar to neuron, which is responsible for memory (Edward, 2009).
This displays the possible importance of using this strategy in speaking classes, and it seems as an effective strategy to encourage the students during the speaking activities. During the learning process, the human brain primarily remembers any items associated with things or stored patterns, or linked to other aspects of what is being learned (Buzan, 1993). By this, mind mapping helps the students to make connections, associate between ideas, and think creatively, which in turn will motivate them to communicate and make presentation in an easy and interesting way compared to conventional ways, whereby it will enhance the students’ level of confidence (Buzan, 2006). Mind mapping helps the students to speak fluently without forgetting or feeling hesitated while speaking.

Therefore, mind mapping is recognized as a clue to guide the students to free the imaginations in order to speak and present the ideas and thoughts confidently using English. Goldberg (2004) argues that mind mapping can accommodate the nonlinear and creative thinking. Thus, it motivates EFL students to speak clearly (Zaid, 1995). Mind mapping permits the students, especially EFL students to think outside the box. Besides, Hillar (2012) also mentions that mind mapping is a useful tool to help students focus in organizing.

3.0 CONCLUSION

This paper explores the use of mind mapping strategy in speaking activity through an analysis of the related literature that reinforces this study. Firstly, as has been shown above, anxiety is the most influential problem faced by EFL students while they are speaking in the classroom. Since it has been proved that speaking skill is a demanding skill for EFL students, they have to improve this skill by using motivated methods. As a matter of fact, the reviewed studies revealed that mind mapping is an effective, useful, and easy method that can help EFL students to overcome the difficulty of speaking and thus speak fluently. Hence, this strategy should be recommended and to be used in improving speaking competency among EFL students. However, more research is demanded to prove the current results and to have more understanding of the benefits of mind mapping.

REFERENCES


Anggraeni, F.M. (2014). The Effect of Mind Mapping Technique Towards the Students’ Speaking Ability At 7th Grade of SMPN 4 Bandar Lampung. *International Conference on Education and Language (ICEL)*, 2


