



Picture Booklets to Improve English Speaking Skills of Slow Learners

Mas Muhammad Idris, Dyah Setyowati Ciptaningrum
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

ABSTRACT

In the postmodern era, English communication skills become a vital requirement to attain one's own target of language learning process both from formal education and non-formal education. It encourages educators throughout the world, including those from Indonesia, to strengthen their English language skills to support many activities in their regular classrooms. Consequently, the roles of educators become very substantial due to the challenge to determine the most appropriate instructional approaches that enable to stimulate both slow and normal learners to comprehend the materials conveyed by teachers. This paper focuses on slow learners who need special treatments in language learning process to at least catch up the average point by using picture booklets (PBs) as an effort to develop their English language skills. Furthermore, five basic characteristics of slow learners are discussed in order to facilitate educators to recognize and educate slow learners properly. In addition, two instructional strategies, namely compensatory teaching (CT) and remedial teaching (RT), are found to be effective approaches to improve English speaking skills of young slow learners in Indonesia.

KEY WORDS

educators, picture booklets, young Indonesian, slow learners, English speaking skills

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

email: masmuhammadidris@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

In the postmodern era, the possession of English communication skills has been emphasized. It becomes a compulsory requirement to be employed in both formal and non-formal education. Nevertheless, such skills vary in terms of passive and active skills. The former skills consist of listening and reading, while the latter consist of speaking and writing. To attain those four skills, learners can obtain them through formal education as a systematic, organised,

structured and administered education model with a set of laws and norms, a fixed curriculum as the objectives, contents and methodology. In addition, learners can learn it through non-formal education which its typical characteristics such as the adoption of strategy that does not require learner's direct attendance, the facility of indirect learning activities between educator and learner, and most activities are arranged to take place outside the institution. The examples of non-formal learning activities are home-reading



and paperwork (Dib, 1987). Basically, the educators have very crucial role to assist the learners in gaining language skills by delivering assorted materials. However, the learners have different and diverse characteristics, i.e., active, reflective, sensitive, intuitive, visual, verbal, sequential, global, and slow learners.

The term of "slow learners" may refer to low-normal students in which most of them are born with problem solving skills. Yet these children are often overlooked since actually have a normal learning ability and are not mentally retarded. Burt (1937) argues that the term of "slow learners" is addressed for those who are not able to cope with normal tasks compared to others in their age group. Additionally, Sebastian (2016) defines "slow learner" as learners who do not show any interest in the learning activities conducted in the school. He further explains that they may be less encouraged by other students hence they need more support from the teachers.

Griffin (2005) states that the relationship between the slow learners and the educators is relatively interchangeable, since they recognise the special position and the importance of each other. The teacher should act as a guard in order to assist directly the learning process of slow learners. Griffin (2005) also argues that the process cannot be completed unless the educator directly notice the capacity of slow learners and perform the learning activities with them. Hence, if the educators attempt to establish a quality relationship, they must spend more time and activities with the group of the slow learners. Nevertheless, slow learners usually have some

problems during their study at the classroom. They need to have more concentration to the material conveyed by teachers in order to gain information from it.

Borah (2013) argues that the slow learners will occasionally struggle to cope with the conventional academic requirements of the regular class. Meanwhile, the slow learners are actually normal students whose problem is that they are not so interested in carrying out the learning activities with traditional system of education. So, it is obvious that they need a special treatment in the learning process. Innovation is required in the process in which it can be derived from the materials or other tools in order to stimulate their concentration, especially related to their speaking skills. Regarding to this, in general, they have some characteristics related with their ages and the degree of problem to acquire knowledge at school. Borah (2013) suggests several characteristics of slow learners including: they are relatively immature in having relationship with others especially in school; they cannot complete a complex task and perform it very slowly; they cannot relate what they have learned in one task to another one; they hardly master skills which are academic in nature, such as spelling rules and times tables; and they have a lack of ability in having long-term goals.

Henceforth, after knowing that one of the weaknesses of slow learners is their limitation in speaking skills, this paper proposes a strategy of using picture booklets (PBs) to stimulate the young slow learners in relation with English speaking skills by involving two



approaches of the compensatory teaching (CT) and the remedial teaching (RT).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wolery and Schuster (1997) on a research entitled "Instructional methods with students who have significant disabilities" have suggested some materials to stimulate the slow learners. They include the utilization of toys, books, and other objects, for instance picture booklets in teaching learning process. Moreover, the materials are classified into four groups: including (1) "material as target stimuli", it means that the materials are solely used to stimulate the ability of the slow learners within a learning activity, such as how to use a radio, how to boot up a computer game, and so forth. Furthermore, it is recommended for the teachers to use specific instruction—which is equipped with supportive materials—in the activities of learning particular skills, i.e., reading words, recognizing prices, naming objects or pictures, and many others;; (2) "Use of materials to set the stage of behaviour", in which the materials employed in the learning process may not be used during the instruction, yet they can increase the desired behaviours or prepare learners for further instruction. The examples of this group are toys for social skills and milieu teaching for material modification; (3) "Support to adaptive behaviours", in which the materials are used as the resources of particular adaptive behaviours. For instance, a conversation book with pictures has been used to illustrate a conversation between a slow learner and others. Hence, they will perform a conversation based on the book

and initiate a conversation with classmates. Furthermore, the use of picture booklets is effective to stimulate the ability of slow learners in relation with their speaking skills. By using picture booklets, they can learn the skills through pictures followed by some instructions. Alternatively, the slow learners can automatically read the instructions and practice it; (4) "Materials as reinforces", in which the identification of reinforces may be a serious challenge for some students and they will be in the form of materials or objects.

Based on the CEFR Model in A1 (Spoken Interaction), the students, in this case the slow learners, are required to introduce another people by using basic greetings and leave-taking expressions, answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, make other understand in simple way, handle numbers and quantities, ask people for things, and so on. In short, the objective of this activity is the slow learners are able to speak orally with the instruction in picture booklets. The examples of the picture booklets are as follows:



Fig. 1 Picture booklets
(Source: google.com).

The picture booklets (PBs) demonstrated in the above figure can be used to stimulate the English-speaking skills of slow learners. Furthermore, the role of the teachers in the utilization of PBs is very significant. They have to prepare some picture booklets (PBs) with the selected themes before teaching slow learners. After preparing the PBs, teacher will employ the PBs to teach the slow learners and ask them to imitate what the teacher says. For instance, the teacher will say “good morning” while showing a picture to the slow learners and they will imitate what the teacher says. It is done several times until the slow learners really master the words told by the teacher. During the activity, the teacher may ask the slow learners to practice with others to reinforce what they have learned. Finally, the class is ended with the teacher recalls or reviews the materials that have been learnt by asking the words in the picture booklets to the students.

In addition, two instructional methods are also employed. *First*, the compensatory teaching approach which is used to stimulate the slow learners through altering the presentation of the content delivered by the educators in the classroom. It attempts to present the content of a material by using alternative means, e.g., pictures vs. words, and complement it with additional resources and activities, i.e., group discussion and learning centers. In other words, by using this technique, the educators are able to use picture booklets to cultivate the English speaking skills of learners since they have weaknesses in mastering a material. *Second*, the method of remedial teaching, which is also effective to improve the English speaking skills of slow learners. The focus of alternative approaches is to eliminate the weaknesses owned by the slow learners, for example the difficulty in producing English words in which the technique will allow them to memorize the words for a couple of time. Furthermore, this technique may be utilized to eliminate or reduce the repetition of teaching a material in which the picture booklets can be included in a session with the material. In short, these two instructional approaches are able to increase the English speaking skills of slow learners.

CONCLUSION

The utilization of Picture Booklets (PBs) as a new tool in improving the English speaking skills of learners, especially for the slow learners, has been done in the present study. It reveals the PBs is simple and effective to be employed in learning activity because the



teachers just show the picture to the learners and introduce specific words to be imitated by slow learners. In addition, two supportive methods, namely the compensatory teaching (CT) and remedial teaching (RT), have been found to be appropriate techniques to facilitate the slow learners in improving their speaking skills. Nevertheless, the present study confirms PBs media and the CT and RT can be a collaborative tool to improve the student's speaking ability and can be used as a reference by other teachers who want to teach English speaking, particularly for the teachers of *Sekolah Luar Biasa* who must also be ready to confront this condition. Furthermore, it is important to understand the characteristics of the slow learners in order to be prepared in teaching them. Essentially, the PBs, CT, and RT are very useful tool to stimulate the English speaking skills of the slow learners.

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