

EFL Students' Reflection on the Use of Discussion Card in Speaking Class

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Article Info

Abstract

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate EFL students' reflection using discussion cards in speaking class. Discussion card was developed as a response to three major challenges that tend to emerge in discussion groups and participatory exercises. First, it renders new or complex issues accessible. Second, it seeks to contribute to participatory justice and third, the cards allow the introduction of expert opinions without expert presence. The research used qualitative study and involved 10 students studying at *Speakgurus* English Course. The study was analyzed using reflection questions from 10 students who were taking this course. The result indicates how the students' feel towards the use of discussion cards. It includes students' difficulty when they first get involved in the discussion, their preference about the topic and how they feel about their speaking skills development. In general, they show positive feelings towards the use of discussion cards in speaking class. However, there should be longitudinal research to create more contribution on students' speaking skill.

1. INTRODUCTION

Virtual meeting is a new platform that has been utilized by the education sector since the limitation of autonomy in terms of face-to-face meeting. The teaching method innovations have indeed progressed by the time following the demand of the quality of education. While the methods in teaching are gradually evolving, the problems in the process of building the methods are also increasing. The lack of students and teachers engagement becomes one of the issues happening in virtual classrooms especially when the students decide to turn off the camera and microphone through their devices. There are many confusions among teachers and educators in serving a good quality of lesson package in an online platform, including the English teachers. As a language class, it is quite challenging to facilitate students' engagement through online tools. Ghavifekr et al., (2016) states that one of the main troubles for the teachers to run their role in the educational sector is the technical skills in operating online technological tools. This problem occurs in many developing countries and affects not only the teachers but also the students.

English competences vary from one another. Spoken language for instance requires supporting elements like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency. Besides, it needs confidence and critical thinking to create substantial spoken arguments. Active

communication is assumed to be one of the challenges that students face even though they possess sufficient vocabulary or a proper grammar accuracy. Syafiq et al. (2021) mentioned that students see that speaking can be more complex than reading, writing and listening for two critical reasons. The first reason is that speaking involves a real conversation and the second reason is that speaking is not something that can be revised. If people have mentioned the words they said it cannot be edited just like what people do in writing as a part of productive English skills.

Syafiq et al. (2021) added that there are several challenges in language class regarding the process of both teaching and learning. These issues including the condition where students feel worry to make mistakes in front of their peers, the lack of vocabulary collection therefore they have to distract their friends to check on some vocabularies, the lack of confidence to express their opinion in spoken language, the long process of composing words and sentences and students also find difficulties to elaborate issues they want to deliver to their audience. These arguments summed up that the students often find difficulties in speaking due to the lack of grammar, fluency and pronunciation. In addition, the lack of competences in constructing ideas in English can be seen as a phenomenon that is not only happening in face-to-face classroom but also in online classroom which has been a trend in the education sector nowadays.

There have been many efforts to increase the number of active participation in the online English speaking classroom. These efforts include embracing technology into English online classrooms and also using interactive methods which can support the participation of students in the class. Sea & Picket (2006) mentioned that as the engine of education, teachers are obliged to increase their knowledge of approaches in the process of online teaching since this process will contribute to the quality of the learning process and students' competence as the product of education. This argument supported the idea of the importance of self-learning or training to improve teachers' competence in equipping teaching materials with a compatible online teaching methodology.

One of the popular methodologies to teach ESL speaking class is the use of cards such as word cards, flashcards and discussion cards. Nation (2008) claimed that the use of word cards will enhance the collection of vocabularies students have in a short period of time. This method also will help students to store the words they learn in a longer period of time. Reese & Wells (2007) investigated the use of card games in improving students' conversation skills. This game aims to develop useful phrases that are commonly used in seminar and public discussion at graduate students level. This research found that the card games helped students in their fluency and critical thinking to deliver their ideas in seminar and formal discussion. Humaira et al. (2021) conducted research about the use of question cards to improve students' speaking skills in junior high school levels. This research resulted in a significant result for the students where all of the students exceeded the minimum standard of achievements. Having a look at some of the studies which generated positive results for students in their speaking abilities development.

One of the common teaching methods ESL students use to teach speaking courses in formal and informal education is discussion cards. According to Folse, (2003) discussion card is able to provide a space for students to discuss a particular topic, allow students to discuss a certain topic, allow students to discuss less apparent issues and also this activity will allow students to promote interlanguage and intercultural information since this can help the participants to gain knowledge from different individuals joining the activity. Furthermore, Bliss & Lawrenczy (2020) stated that in an asynchronous or online meeting there are five important parts of discussion that have to be taken into account. These five things play an important role in the phase and structure of a discussion. These parts including:

Students participation

Student participation can be categorized as the most important part in a discussion. The quantity of students contributing in a discussion will be a sign of an engaging discussion. Teachers can also justify how active the students are when they are ready to set some

arguments to the floor. Taking serious attention to students' participation in a discussion is a job a teacher has to fulfill in a discussion method.

Quantity of students posting

One of the problems in a discussion is the imbalance in the quantity of participation. This includes the duration of speech for every participant. Another problem appearing is not every participant enrolled in the class participation in every topic served.

Quality of students posting

Not only the quantity of the students posted in a discussion matters. The quality of the students is a thing teachers need to analyze since it is essential for students to deliver a substantial argument with a good elaboration every time they participate. The quality of arguments decides how effective discussion runs. The participants can construct an effective discussion when they can create a good flow of communication.

Extent of threading

Threading can sometimes be defined as the level of elaboration an argument is developed by a speaker or participant of discussion. This term can also be defined as the length of duration of the argument delivery. The level and duration is important since when students participate they need to show "a make sense" arguments to keep the phase of a discussion.

Instructor presence

Last but not least is an instructor presence. Instructor presence is taking the same important role as the students participation in a discussion. Instructor plays a role as "a game master" of the discussion which decides the run of the discussion and whether or not participants can take part in a discussion.

2. METHODS

The study would provide a deep analysis of the participant's perception after their completion in an English speaking course that focuses on the development of speaking skills including fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In this study, the researcher used qualitative design, which solved the problem of searching for data. The participants of this study were the students of the SpeakGuru course. This course was chosen since the researcher is the instructor of the class and the researcher understood the process and the development of the students in the class. In addition, among 12 students asked, there were only nine people who responded to the questionnaires.

Procedure of Data Collection

The procedures of data collection in this research were: first, the researcher prepared the administrative documents for the research in agreement with the organization to conduct the research. Second, the researcher received the data about the number of participants and their contacts. Third, the researcher discussed the method of collecting the responses of the participants. Fourthly, the researcher sent the research instruments (questionnaires by google form) to the participants via email. And finally, the researcher analyzed the data based on the questionnaire's responses.

Technique data collection

The primary instrument of this research was an online questionnaire powered by google form, the researcher provides eight questions to be responded to as the data collection technique. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to get a picture of the changes in social values that they owned after returning home. In this study, the questionnaire used both open and close- ended questionnaires, the series of questions formed as multiple choice questions and essays. The questions measured opinions, attitudes, and knowledge of the participants.

Technique of Data Analysis

The researcher used content analysis steps according to Powell and Renner (2003) as the analysis. This analysis was used to give the study more detailed information about the teachers' reflection.

Participants

The participants of this research consist of nine participants in the SpeakGuru ESL Speaking course. SpeakGuru is a formal English course which provides English thematic private mentoring online class. This course has a special program for an English interview, IELTS Speaking and Intensive courses abroad. The nine participants in the research were joining a private and group speaking course.

Materials

The material of the discussion cards are provided by the curriculum team of the course. The topic of the course varies from different aspects of life such as economy, politics, social-culture, education, psychology, technology, etc. The discussion cards that are served to the students typically follow some structures. The discussion cards start with a general question as a scaffolding to bridge students' understanding. It is followed by a warming up in a form of listening practice that is followed by a listening questions test. The discussion card also serves a vocabulary list from the listening and phrases of today. Next, the cards provide some statements that need to be responded to by the participants. This part allows participants to state their side whether to agree or disagree to the statements posted in the card. This part can sometimes take time since the students oftentimes show a critical idea towards their stance. The last part of the discussion card is a reflection time. This part allows students to check their progress after a meeting. Finally, the course closes the meeting with a five-minute feedback from the instructor. This part allows the instructors to give some notes to the students. Examples of discussion cards are as follows:

Picture 1. Responding Statement

'Faces don't provide us with a map of the personality of others. Rather, the impressions we draw from faces reveal a map of our own biases and stereotypes' (Alexander Todorov).



How would you respond to the statement above?

Picture 2. Asking for an opinion

What is your opinion on this statement?

Your effort to look neat when you meet someone for the first time has fulfilled half of his/her first impressions of you.



Picture 3. Reflection Session

Reflection time

What did you learn from this session?



*The mentor gives each student chance to say what they learned from this session.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Research Process

The first thing the researcher did was to ask for the SpeakGuru students' agreement including how this research would be used and where the responses would be presented. The communication was conducted through a WhatsApp group. Most of the members agreed to give their responses and share the response to any conference. After the agreement, the researcher prepared the instrument using google form and shared the instrument link to the group. Among 12 students in the group there were only nine people filling out the electronic questionnaires until the deadline of the submission. However, the responses submitted could represent the various student representatives (group and private class) therefore the responses could be taken to the next step, data analysis. There were about 6 questions both open ended and close ended. The questions included The reason for joining the course, the most favorite part of the discussion, the most interesting topic that has been discussed and their feelings about their speaking skills development. After the deadline submission, the researcher then moved to the next research phase.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the researcher divided the discussion into four main categories. The reason for joining the course, the most favorite part of the discussion, the most interesting topic that has been discussed and their feelings about their speaking skills development.

Before going further to the discussion, the researcher would like to describe the length of students' duration before taking part in the survey or questionnaire. From the 9 obtained respondents, there are 33.3% of the participants that had joined the course for 1-3 months, 33.3% of the participants are they who had taken the course for 3-6 months, 22.2% had the course for 6-12 months and another 11.1 had the course for more than a year.

The Reason for Joining the Course

The proliferation of online English courses has become a trend during a pandemic. This phenomenon happened because the internet creates a free opportunity for people to meet people without mobility from one place to another. Marija (2012) stated that online learning has become popular since the internet serves as an easier way of learning where people do not need to meet in person. The question of why joining the session has been asked to the students every time they attend the meeting for the first time.

When students were asked about their reason for joining the course, 88% of the respondents stated that their initial reason to join the course was to improve their speaking skills. The responses reported including:

“Improve my english skill thats why i must used it everyday.” R3

“Improve my speaking skill for sure” R5

“To improve my english skill” R6

“Improve my english skill” R9

While most of the participants felt that the biggest reason for joining the course is to improve their speaking skills. Other participants mentioned that they have some personal reasons why they joined the course. Some of them were:

“I took this course just to upgrade my English skills cause, my parents decided to let me study abroad.” R1

“I want to improve My english and do something positive at night, and Just want to have Fun With others” R2

“I need English enviroment to improve my ability in speaking English and have friends to talk with” R4

Having a look at the responses, the respondents also see that joining the speaking course also fulfills their social need where they have to meet people after a day full of work. These responses also raise the issue of online social interaction that can be conducted through an online academic platform like an English course in SpeakGuru.

The Most Favorite Part of the Discussion

Nandi et al., (2012) conducted research on online learning courses for two semesters. This research analyzed the data and resulted in the fact that students are able to completely engage in online courses in some parts of the discussion. It is sometimes obvious to perceive that there are some parts of the online discussion where the students are not able to put their 100% focus. This part will share about students' most favorite part of the discussion. Some of the students agreed that the interaction with the other participants in a discussion is their most favorite part of the discussion:

“The discussion and new facts that I get.” R5

“Interactive ways” R6

“The interaction” R7

These responses are entangled with the fact that some students were participating in the group discussion since they wanted to socialize with other people. It can be assumed that the new generation of participants involved in an academic English course uses the platform to fulfill their social interaction needs as well as using the time to improve the professional skills they need in their daily profession. From the responses as well, some participants argued that they choose this academic platform. Some of the participants responded:

“Various interesting topics, it help me to learn about another general knowledge too.” R1

“Talking about many topics” R2

“Discussion on certain topics” R8

“new thing discussion, it's also increase my knowledge” R9

Having a look at the above responses, it can be obtained that the participants also choose to join this topic to improve their knowledge about different issues around the world. Having an academic discussion will make the participants “up to date” to the recent issues happening all around the world. The process of obtaining the information will be also presented in a very fun discussion so that they do not have to dive deep into hard reading or intensive listening. The discussion also collects different points of view from the different people. This part was one of the most interesting perspectives.

The Most Favorite Topic

Topics of discussion become one of the most influential factors determining the flow of discussion besides the actor of the discussion (students and teacher). Topic of discussion is affected by the knowledge of students related to the topic discussed. There were several times where students struggled to raise two-three points of their arguments because of the limited information they have related the topic. This part will discuss the most favorite topic of students participating in the discussion. One of the most requested topic of the discussion is about lifestyle. Here are some responses from the participants:

“Food nutrition. I like this topic the most cause, I enjoy that material, and then I'm familiar with that kind of topic. I like the easier one so, food nutrition that's a really interesting topic for me. Food nutrition is a simple topic but, I got so many new facts and that's the important thing in our life.” R1

“Daily activity topic, because It's related to our daily life, its so easy to make us us the words, compare to ekonomics or politics it's so hard to explain those things in english , sometimes in bahasa also complicated

🤔🤔 “R2

“The topic about business, social media, food or something like healthy lifestyle” R7

“It depends on my knowledge through the issue, but Social Media is the best topic to discuss. Because we are really close to that issue” R8

Having a look at the above responses, we could see that participants of the course had various reasons to join the course. In terms of lifestyle, the participants assumed that joining a speaking course is one of the essential activities the generation needs to have. It is a good sign of this generation since the respondents as part of the generation have an awareness to upgrade their skills through many platforms both offline and online. From the above data, we can also assume that the most interesting topics they were aware of can be in the area of simple lifestyles such as social media and food. This responses also show that the discussion might be run in a very formal casual conversation where the participants can be comfortably talking about their favorite food or the way they use social media in their lives.

Not only about something light. The participants also shared similar interests about psychological-culture ideas such as mental issues and family life. This data can be found in this response.

“MBTI and Anxiety Disorder. Because we can share about our experience” R3

“Basically all the topics are great, very updated about hypes issues nowadays. However I put on enthusiastic when talked about self improvement, working, career, news etc” R5

“Healt and family ,because both of them related with my condition” R9

The above responses also show that the discussion constructed can be deep as well. Participants can share their problems or issues regarding their self-improvement, anxiety and other mental issues. This proves that in day-to-day activities the trend to share information through an online meeting. The trend of sharing personal information to the foreigner that the participants had not met in person can be an idea that can be connected from the responses of the participants.

Participants' Speaking Ability

Participants' speaking competence is one of the main issues in this research. Khan & Ali (2010) mentioned that the existence of English courses will create a trend where society can possess a result from consistent training. For this reason, it is very essential to conduct a good quality of teachers' training as well as conducting different kinds of activities related to literature and language. This trend creates opportunities to enhance the competence of the participants of the course. Having a deep look on the previous idea, it can be assumed that there is a need to establish a sustainable process of teacher training in English speaking courses in regards to the development of the students' development.

In the answers of the questionnaires obtained. It can be seen that students had various responses regarding their development. The responses can be seen from this data:

"More confidence and trigger me to learn more and more" R1

"my english skill increased after i attend this course" R3

"I have an Improvement day by day ,eventhough still there are many mistakes But at least I understand what the questions from others and I know How to answer that questions, I'll Keep Working in it." R4

"It's getting better time by time. I don't nervous like in the beginning" R5

"Feeling good, supported, enhance and get the feed back is one of important things from this course since we will recognize what something wrong both of Grammar and Vocabulary" R6

"Despite, there is so many weakneses in my speaking skills, joining conversation class, really affects my skills compared to the previous one. I feel my skills are improved and also boost my confidence" R8

"I feel a lot of progress, more confident to speaking English, especially in pronunciation" R9

There were several points that can be concluded from the above responses despite the similarities in terms of their language skills' improvement and their confidence in speaking English. The following table will share the map of students' opinions regarding their satisfaction in the session.

Table 1. Parcipants' opinion map

Opinio	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9
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Confidence	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Improvement			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Trigger to learn	✓	✓		✓					
Better interaction			✓			✓		✓	

Several points we could see from the table are:

Confidence

Changing people's behavior is one of the most difficult tasks people need to conduct. It could take weeks or years of training for someone to be actually feeling confident in something they are not confident with. In terms of students' speaking confidence, there are several skills participants in English courses have to possess to gain proper confidence. According to (Ismail, 2015) students' self-confidence plays a very important role in building character to begin any action in social interaction. He also states that in terms of building effective communication, it is really essential to possess self-confidence in order to gain the courage to start a conversation either in a public or private situation.

Furthermore, in the light of confidence, Light & McNaughton (2014) mentioned that there were several fundamental constructs in building confidence in communication. These constructs including:

Functionality of communication: this construct refers to the use of communication in regards to the situation. This construct affects the way people socialize in a community such as home, school and office. Moreover, this idea leads to the principle of being comfortable to speak up speakers' minds. In relation to participants' confidence level, it is quite important to highlight the point that participants' feeling to be comfortable with the idea they want to deliver. From the above responses, we could also conclude that the English course which highlights the use of day-to-day communication helped the students to feel comfortable speaking to the community they were interacting with.

Adequacy of communication: when we talk about confidence, it is also important to see the line of goals of communication: To be confident means to be actually knowing the goals of communication the participants conducted in their interaction. This communicative competence needs a focus to enhance students' skill so that students are able to meet the purpose of the communication. In the line with the above response, it can be concluded that students were able to be satisfied with the purpose of the communication they conduct in their daily conversation.

Sufficient Knowledge, Judgment, and Skills: Talking about knowledge, judgment and skill, it is expected for the participants to be not only sufficiently capable to state their idea but also to be substantially good to deliver their ideas by the support of knowledge they have. These skills will help their judgment of an issue they are being asked and enhance all other skills such as fluency, pronunciation and grammar. This also means that the responses students mentioned in the questionnaire have not really touched the area of improving knowledge in the academic stage.

Improvement

The term of improvement in ESL speaking competence has been discussed in many terms in academic situations. Boonkit (2010) stated that the way to enhance the participants of a speaking course is really essential as part of the responsibility of the instructors or teachers wherever they are working and whomever they are working with. The research found out that there were three key aspects of improvement that a person should pay attention to when they want to speak to other people. They consist of confidence, creativity of topics and speaking competence (pronunciation, grammar, fluency and vocabulary). Taking a look at this information, we could conclude that besides the confidence and competency, creativity in the topic also affects the improvement of the participants to deliver their ideas. This reflects the process of students speaking improvement in the class where they pay attention to the different topic everyday and they use the topic to improve their speaking competences. Speakguru EFL Speaking course constructed a curriculum which trains students' speaking skills in different topics (lifestyle, economy, environment, etc) and exercises (listening, vocabulary and obviously speaking). This method helped participants to be completely ready to discuss different kinds of topics in a real situation.

Trigger to Learn

Trigger to learn is a quality that is quite important to have in students or learners character. This is a concept which is quite similar to long life learning where there has to be a fire that keeps the students to have a willingness to learn new things. Ullrich (2005) mentioned that this willingness to learn builds a driving force to look for a learning object. In terms of the course in Speakguru, the object of learning has been prepared by the course curriculum and admin. The terms trigger to learn on the side of students meaning students were triggered to read and also search many things as the response of the conversation or discussion students have in the class. From the eye of the researcher that also played a role as an instructor in this class, students tended to search some information through google or other search engines at the time they found a difficult term of supporting information towards the idea they wanted to deliver. This process helped the participants of the course to maintain their willingness to speak English in various kinds of topics.

Better Interaction

Interaction is one of the important triggers students want to achieve when they want to join an EFL speaking course. In the case of Speakguru course, students registered for the class for the reason like they need to interact with foreign customers in English or they work with colleagues who can only speak English therefore it became a demand for them to improve their speaking in the professional point of view. To enhance the skill of interaction through an online speaking course is not an easy job. Students must put a better concentration to be actually ready to store the gist of the information or knowledge delivered in the online meeting. Even Though it is not easy to study through an online platform, the practice helped students to improve their interaction. According to Swan (2001), online learning plays an essential role to improve students' satisfaction to see the process of learning. This way of teaching creates different kinds of interaction and models that can help students to be more motivated and trigger the willingness to discover the other methods of learning. Having a look at this statement, we could assume that the idea of online learning is a non-effective way of learning and the assumption that students hate online learning is not merely correct. The research that was conducted by Swan proved that online learning contributed to students' interest to discover different learning methods.

In terms of students' perspective on their learning in Speakguru. The responses of the participants were really positive, students felt that the process that is provided by the team supported the way of students to get a better interaction at the time they use the language outside the session. The report also mentioned how students felt satisfied after having some practices and following the session from the course. It can be reported that the students gained more confidence about their ability to speak English. This is also a good sign of the

success of the teacher, curriculum team and students that they are able to construct a course which helps students to feel better in building a conversation in English. It is also quite important to remember that changing students' mindset is not an easy job. The record of students' satisfaction after they join a class will be a great foundation in the assessment later.

4. CONCLUSION

Students and teachers' reflections become a demand of education nowadays. It is because a teaching learning process professionally needs feedback to help the participants gain a better understanding of the process of their learning or the process of implementing the learning in the scheme of education. This research presented the students' responses on the process and output of knowledge they perceived by joining the Speakguru English course. Overall, the output of the course was considered positive by the students. These output and responses can be a quality that the institution needs to consider to continue the process of learning in the future. Talking about the output of the course, there are four most frequent answers considered by the students. Almost 75 percent of the participants reported that Speakguru helped them to boost their confidence in using English in their daily life. After the course, they perceived that it is not too awkward to state opinions to the community around them and also to friends that share the same interest of learning Bahasa. 65 percent of the participants also agreed that they experience improvement after several meetings joining the course. The fact leads to the idea that through the efforts they had in the meeting, they could perceive the improvement in terms of their English speaking competences. There are about 35 percent of the students also who agreed that the process of them learning in Speakguru directs their interest to learn different kinds of topics. This competence will definitely help the students to develop their English competence out of the session of the course. Last but not least, about 35 percent of the students also reported that they experienced better interaction when they were in their community. This competence will give not only a preparation for students in their interaction using English but also in other interaction they are applying in their community.

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