THE USE OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN IMPROVING THE STUDENTS` SPEAKING SKILL
(A Classroom Action Research at One of Primary Schools in Bandung)

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Abstract: The paper reporst on a two-cycle action research conducted at a Year 4 class at one primary school in Bandung. This study aimed to find out whether Project-based Learning could improve young learners' speaking skill or not and what speaking aspects were improved through PBL. It also aimed to investigate what speaking activities were used in PBL to improve their speaking skill. To collect the data, participatory observation was done for eight meetings and speaking assessment was conducted three times in the first, fifth, and eighth meetings (Pre-test, Post-test 1, Post-test 2). Qualitative analysis was also used in this design of study. The findings show that PBL could improve the students' speaking skill. It was indicated by the improvement of the students' speaking aspects adapted from Harries (1984) and Brown (2004) covering comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. Of all the five aspects, comprehension and vocabulary were improved most significantly. As for the speaking activities used in PBL, this study used the ones proposed by Brown (2004) and Kayi (2006). Of 21 speaking activities, nine of them were used, namely drilling, storytelling, directed response, picture-cued, translation of limited stretches of discourse, question and answer, discussion, games, and role-play. Based on this study, it is suggested that Project-based Learning is implemented in teaching speaking in primary schools.

Keywords: *Speaking skill, speaking aspects, speaking activity, young learners, Project-based Learning*

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Introduction

According to the national standards in Indonesia (Depdiknas, 2006), oral communication competence or speaking skill is the goal of English learning in elementary schools. Speaking skill is considered as an initial skill that leads learners to develop the other communication competences (reading and writing) (ibid.). This is in line with Linse (2005) saying that speaking is the first step that needs to be learned by young English language learners before they can read and write in English. However, it is assumed that developing speaking skill to young learners in Indonesia is not easy because of the status of English as a foreign language in which it is not used in national or social life (Broughton, 2003).

An observation that I did in an elementary school in Northern Bandung, exactly in the Year 4 class, proved the difficulty of developing speaking skill in that school. The school was developing an English learning program to optimize the use of English in verbal context. However, English was still considered merely as a subject by the students so that the school needed to create situations that can improve the students' speaking skill.

In the view of this, Project based Learning (PBL) is one of the methods recommended to be used. PBL refers to a method allowing "students to design, plan, and carry out an extended project that produces a publicly exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation" (Patton, 2012:13). Through PBL, the learners are engaged in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities (project-work), so that they have the opportunity to use the language in a relatively natural context (Haines, 1989, as cited in Fragoulis, 2009) and participate in meaningful activities which require authentic language use (Fragoulis, 2009).

The success of PBL implementation has been reported by Gaer (1998) who taught speaking skill to a population of Southeast Asian refugees who had been in their beginning-level ESOL (English for Speaker of Other Language) classes. Their speaking skill is improved through PBL.

Viewing the success of PBL implementation to Asian refugees in the United States by Gaer, this study tries to apply PBL in Indonesian context, especially to

young English learners. This study attempted to find out whether PBL could improve the students' speaking skill or not, what speaking aspects werre improved, and what speaking activities were used to improve the students' speaking skill. The scope of this study exposed the use of PBL in improving young English learners' speaking skill.

Literature Review

Project is defined as complex tasks based on problems encountered by students, conducted in certain periods of time and culminated in realistic products that might be in form of presentation, exhibition, publication, etc. (Thomas, 2000). The project is supposed to be long-term, requires teamwork among students, and results in a substantial final product (Thompson & Beak, 2007, as cited in Cruz & Vik, 2007). It means not every task can be considered as project. According to Patton (2012), in PBL students are the ones designing the project and planning what need to do to carry it out. From those statements, it can be inferred that PBL is a method in which the students are learning through a project that is decided by themselves with the help from teachers so that they can be actively engaged in the learning process.

There are some stages of PBL implementation according to Kriwas (1999, as cited in Bell, 2010). The first is speculation in which teachers provide the choice of project topics initially based on curriculum and discuss them with the students. In this stage, teachers and students speculate possibilities that will lead to the projects smoothly (Bell, 2010). However, for the beginner or lower level students, teachers can choose the project by themselves but still consider the students' problem. This was because it was assumed that "the students in beginner or lower level do not have the language or confidence to develop project themes" (Gaer, 1998) so that the teachers need to lead them first before they can decide by themselves.

The second stage is designing the project activities, referring to organizing the structure of a project activity that includes group formation, role assigning, concerning methodology decision, information source, etc (Bell, 2010).

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The third is conducting the project activities in which the students work what had been planned and designed in the previous stage. At this stage, the students gather information, discuss it with their group member, consult problems encountered in their work with the teachers, and exhibit their final products that might be in form of presentation, performance, product, publication, etc. to wider community such as other classes, teachers, foreigners, etc.

The last stage is evaluation referring to "the assessment of activities from the participants and discussion about whether the initial aims and goals have been achieved, implementation of the process, and final products" (Brinia, 2006, as cited in Fragoulis, 2009: 115). Bell (2010) also says that the evaluation, towards the project organization, problems encountered during the process of working it, students attitudes toward it, etc., also includes evaluation from others and self-evaluation.

Fragoulis (2009) and Bell (2010) state that there are many benefits of implementing PBL in teaching English as Foreign Language.

1. PBL gives contextual and meaningful learning for students
2. PBL can create optimal environment to practice speaking English.
3. PBL can also make students actively engage in project learning
4. PBL enhances the students' interest, motivation, engagement, and enjoyment.
5. PBL promotes social learning that can enhance collaborative skills
6. PBL can give an optimal opportunity to improve students' language skill

Methodology

This study employs action research as the research method. This study takes two reflective cycles consisting of four processes proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1990), namely planning, action observation, and reflection. This method is used in order to see the process of the improvement of the students' speaking skill from the first cycle to the second one.

This study was conducted at an elementary school in Northern Bandung. The participants of this study were Year 4 B consisting of 29 students. Of the total

number of the students, only 18 students were included as participant. This was because of some considerations related to students' absence and their participation in some assessments in Cycles 1 and 2. To collect the data, participatory observation and speaking assessment are used. Tomal (2003) states that by doing participatory observation, researchers can obtain actual firsthand information regarding the subjects because the researchers picture directly what are observed in the real life situation. As for speaking assessments, they are conducted three times (Pre-test, Post-test 1, and Post-test 2). The speaking assessment sheet used contains five aspects of speaking skill, namely comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. Each aspect has its own criteria scaled from 1-5 (adapted from Harries, 1984, and Brown, 2004).

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Table 3.4 The Criteria of Speaking Aspects

Criteria	Comprehension	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Pronunciation
5	Appears to understand everything without difficulty	Speaks in L2 with accurate English words	Produces complete and accurate sentences (E.g. 1. This is Gasibu, 2. I can see many people there. 3. I can buy some clothes)	Speaks in L2 very fluently and effortlessly.	Speaks in L2 Intelligibly and has few traces of foreign accent.
4	Understands nearly everything at normal speed, although occasional repetition may be necessary.	Speaks mostly in L2 with few L1 words	Produces some phrases instead of complete sentences with consistent and accurate word order (E.g. 1. Gasibu. 2. Seeing many people. 3.buying some clothes) or produces consistent omitted sentence (E.g. buy some clothes, see many people)	Speaks in L2 less fluently due to few problems of vocabulary/selection of word.	Speaks mostly in L2 Intelligibly with mother tongue accent.
3	Understands most of what is said at slower-than-normal speed with many repetitions.	Produces 4-6 English words.	Produces inconsistent and incorrect sentences/ phrases (E.g. I can walking around, buy food, some game, etc).	Speaks mostly in L2 with some long pauses and hesitancy.	Speaks mostly in L1, but produces 1-3 English words and pronounce them in intelligible mother tongue accent.
2	Has great difficulty understanding what is said, often misunderstands the Qs.	Produces 1-3 English words (brands or place names such as KFC, Roppan, etc. do not count as English word/vocabulary) due to very limited vocabulary	Answers mostly in L1, with 1-3 English words/phrases (Madsen, 1983).	Speaks mostly in L1, Tries to speak in L2 but so halting with so many pauses and "er.."	Speaks mostly in L1, but produces 1-3 English words. Needs some repetition in pronouncing the words to understand them.
1	Unable to comprehend the material so that unable to express/respond the questions correctly.	Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make conversation in L2 virtually impossible so that the student speaks in L1 all the time.	Unidentified because of speaking in L1 all the time.	Unidentified because of speaking in L1 all the time.	Unidentified because of speaking in L1 all the time.

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Data Presentation and Discussion

- The Improvement of the Students' Speaking Skill through PBL

Based on the observation done before and after PBL implementation in the classroom, this study found that PBL improves the students speaking skill. In preliminary observation, most of the students speak in L1 when the teacher asked, greeted, or instructed them in English (e.g. "How do you do?" or "please come forward."). Even some of them do not respond to the teacher. After given PBL treatments for 8 meetings, the students are able to respond and speak in English.

The students' speaking skill improvement is indicated by the increase of the number of the students in the highest criteria of speaking aspects (comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation). Each aspect is scaled from one until five. The lowest criterion is one and the highest one is five (to know the meaning of each criterion, see Page 6). The following table summarizes the increase of the student number from low criteria of speaking aspects to the higher ones.

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Table 4.1 The Increase of the Student Number in Speaking Aspect Criteria

Aspect	Criteria														
	Pre-test					Post-test 1					Post-test 2				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Comprehension (C)	1	3	4	1	9	0	0	0	4	14	0	0	1	3	14
Vocabulary (V)	5	5	5	0	3	0	0	5	9	4	0	0	4	5	9
Grammar (G)	5	5	6	2	0	0	0	12	2	4	0	0	10	3	5
Fluency (F)	10	2	2	3	1	0	1	6	9	2	0	2	6	8	2
Pronunciation (P)	5	4	3	5	1	0	0	1	16	1	0	0	0	15	3

The table above reveals that the number of the students in the highest criteria of speaking aspects increases. This result corroborates Gaer's study (1998) about PBL that improves students' speaking skill.

- The Improvement of the Students' Speaking Aspects through PBL

The results of the speaking assessments show that of all the five aspects, comprehension and vocabulary were the most significant aspects improved. The improvement of the students' speaking aspects was indicated by the increase of the number of the students to the highest criteria of both aspects (see Table 4.1 above).

Before given PBL treatments, some of the students were quite hard to comprehend what the teacher said in English. After the treatments, most of them were able to comprehend it. It is proved by the increase of the number of the students in C5. Initially in the Pre-test, of 18 students, only 9 who appear to understand everything without difficulty (C5). After the treatments, in Post-test 2 it becomes 14 students.

As for vocabulary aspect, the students' vocabulary is also improved quite significantly. It was proven by the increase of the number of the students in the highest criteria of vocabulary aspect. Initially, only 3 students speak in English with quite accurate dictions (V5). After PBL treatments, it becomes 9 students.

The other aspects (grammar, fluency, and comprehension) are also improved. However, compared with comprehension and vocabulary aspects, they seemed to improve less significantly. These findings corroborates the theory saying that PBL can give an optimal opportunity to improve students' language skill (Levine, 2004, as cited in Fragoulis, 2009).

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- The Speaking Activities Used in PBL to Improve the Students' Speaking Skill

    Based on the data, it is found that among 21 speaking activities proposed by Brown (2001, 2004) and Kayi (2006), nine of them are used in this study. Those are: 1) Imitative: drilling and storytelling, 2) Intensive: directed response, picture-cued, and translation of limited stretches of discourse, 3) Responsive: question and answer, 4) Transactional Interactive: discussion and games, and 5) Interpersonal interactive: role play.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are drawn as the following. First, in this study PBL improves the students' speaking skill. It was proved by the improvement of speaking aspects proposed by Harries (1984) and Brown (2004) that is used as the framework of this study.

Second, speaking aspects proposed by Harries and Brown that are improved through PBL are comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. The improvement of speaking aspects of each student is different because of their different ZPD (zone of proximal Development) (Vygotski, as cited in Cameron, 2001).

The last, among 21 activities proposed by Brown (2004), nine of them are used in this study. Each activity helps to improve some particular speaking aspects: 1) Drilling helps to improve the students' comprehension, grammar, and pronunciation aspect. 2) Storytelling helps to improve the students' comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation aspect. 3) Directed response helps to improve the students' comprehension, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation aspect. 4) Picture-cued helps to improve the students' comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation aspect. 5) Translation of limited stretches of discourse helps to improve the students' comprehension and vocabulary aspect. 6) Question and answer helps to improve the students' comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar aspect. 7) Discussion helps to improve the students' comprehension and vocabulary aspect. 8) Games help to improve the

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students' comprehension and vocabulary aspect. 9) Role-play helps to improve the students' comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation aspect.

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