

Skype in The Classroom

An Online Collaboration Awareness Campaign to Develop Speaking Skill

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Abstract—In recent years, 21st century learning has been at the centre of Malaysian education system. Digitalise learning is the way forward for students in Malaysia. However, students have high language learning anxiety especially in speaking in the second language. This small scale case study through an online collaborative project has been adapted to explore students' perception towards an awareness campaign as a part of an English lesson using Skype in the Classroom. Ten year 6 (12 years old) primary school students around Malaysia were selected. Students were interviewed on their learning experience, interaction and motivation with using Skype in the Classroom. A video recording analysis was used to further support the findings. Results showed that Skype in the Classroom reduced students' anxiety and further develop their speaking skill.

Keywords— *Language anxiety, Skype in the Classroom, Speaking, Education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia aims in becoming a developed nation by the year 2020. The government established specific goals to address and acknowledge the mapping of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in driving the national transformation. In order to build a knowledge-based economy in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution, school education has to be transformed with ICT as an enabler to access a much wider source of information, increase innovation and creativity and encourage critical thinking for problem solving [1]. With access to various digital learning platforms, tools that allow second language learners to learn about the target language through active real-world environment and scenario. Learning should not be within the boundaries of the four walls and through the digital learning platforms that exists, pupils can learn while interacting using the target language. These technological advances can help teachers to provide new approaches to language learning and prepare students to inherit different platforms of second language acquisition. A lot of effort has been put into upgrading Malaysian pupils' language proficiency namely the introduction of CEFR, LINUS to address English language literacy as well as the new and revised curriculum. Skype in the Classroom is an innovative way to help develop speaking skill. An online collaborative project (awareness campaign) was introduced in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom in order to develop speaking skills via Skype in the Classroom.

II. BRIEF INTRODUCTION ON SKYPE IN THE CLASSROOM

Microsoft Educator Community is a free teaching and learning website that focuses on the education community around the world. There are thousands of lessons and classroom activities which span all areas of learning. Microsoft Educator Community is a platform for educator to share their lessons using tools that spark creativity. Skype in the Classroom is one the tool that educators may use to connect pupils with other people around the world. Quoted from the Microsoft education website "Skype in the Classroom is a free community that offers live transformative educational experiences for students including Virtual Field Trips, talks from Guest Speakers, classroom to classroom connections, and live collaboration projects". Skype in the Classroom is fairly new in Malaysia. However, as of 2018, there are more than 200 teachers that are using it as a learning tool in their classroom.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Issues in Speaking*

Speaking a second language is already a difficult and arduous task. The ability and confidence to speak in English (as a second language) is an issue for non-native speakers not only in this country but all over the world [2]. In Malaysian primary school, pupils would spend six years in learning English as a Second Language with the hope of being able to speak the language. Unfortunately, Malaysian pupils are still weak in speaking the language. Numerous programs have been introduced to improve pupils' literacy in reading and writing. However, there is no specific program design to tackle the issues faced by the pupils in speaking English as a second language. Traditionally, speaking skill is taught in the classroom, but with no conviction since the skill is not tested in exams. Pupils do not even use the language during English lessons. Therefore, one of the main functions of language teachers should be to provide as many opportunities as possible for their learners to develop their speaking skill in the target language so that they can interact with others. However, this prove to be a demanding task for language teachers due to the fact that second language learners perceive speaking task as difficult thus increasing their language learning anxiety.

B. Digital Technology in Language Learning and Teaching

The Vygotsky [3] Social Constructivist Theory and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Theory of Foreign Language Anxiety [6] are the underpinning theories of this study. Both of these theories are used as a lens to look at the relationship of Skype in the Classroom and developing speaking skill in relation to language learning anxiety. In language learning, social interactions promote and creates new knowledge [3]. Previous studies that looked into digital communicative learning has adopted similar theory [3] where pupils learn through knowledgeable interaction [4][5]. Second language learning has multiple criterias in which is related to language learning anxiety [6]. Pichet (2009) [7], Correa (2015) [8], Blaurock (2011) [5] and Azizah (2017) [9] Multiple researchers [5][7][8][9] that looked into second language learning agreed that anxious students do not perform well in relations to foreign language learning theory [6].

Language learning occurs through conversations among students and faculty when they create knowledge together, in real time, without physically being together in the same place [10]. There have been many studies on the use of Skype in second language learning. The use of Skype as an interaction tools in second language learning among university graduates motivated students to use the target language [4] [11]. However, Skype as an educational medium worked as a second language learning tool but lack the classic personal teacher – pupil's relationship [12]. This study however aims to look at primary pupils' experience in using Skype in the Classroom in the Malaysian context.

Skype was perceived by teachers to be an easy tool for them to help students acquire knowledge because it enabled them to provide examples of concepts and skills, assess immediate understanding, and engage in constructive dialogue [4]. Students and instructors had a positive experience interacting through Skype, they perceived the Skype interactions to be helpful at improving students' writing skills and building rapport [4].

Students perceived the Skype sessions helped them to acquire new skills and gain confidence through positive interactive dialogue with their instructors [4]. However, digital learning tools that focuses on second language learning such as Skype, had a negative impact on student learning because students felt pressured to speak when they were not ready and had a shorter response time [13]. However, there is limited previous research that focuses on digital learning tools in non-native primary school students.

The researcher chooses Skype in The Classroom as the second language learning tool is because of the large learning community established by Microsoft. This will help the researcher to conduct a Skype in The Classroom session with other schools. There is also a large group of schools in Malaysia participating with the online learning community. Moreover, the interface and functions of Skype is suitable with the objectives of this study.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative data were collected through interview with the participants. Interview questions were derived in relation to Castillo-Montoya [14] interview protocol. Apart from that, a recording

of the Skype in the Classroom session was observed and analysed. Purposive sampling was used to select participants in which ten, 12 years old pupils were chosen based on their mid-term assessment and speaking proficiency. These participants were chosen from a primary school located in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. Average level pupils were chosen as they have some basic in speaking English. These pupils came from a low-cost apartment with limited English-speaking environment and family that does not put any importance in learning English as a second language. Participants were required to participate in an online collaborative awareness campaign through Skype in the Classroom. Six other schools were chosen as collaborative partners.

A. Research questions

This case study was conducted to answer the following questions

- What is the pupils' perception towards Skype in the Classroom to develop speaking skills?
- What are the challenges in conducting and preparing a Skype in the Classroom collaborative lesson?

B. Procedures

The teacher selected 10 pupils to involve in the awareness campaign project. Using a software called Microsoft Sway, the pupils helped by the teacher created a Sway page as an advertisement to attract collaborators. The awareness campaign focused on reducing plastic pollution in line with the United Nation (UN) World Environment Day. The teacher then conducted a lesson on plastic pollution for pupils to better understand the topic that they were going to talk on.

Upon receiving participation from six schools in and around Malaysia, the teacher decided on the date to conduct the awareness campaign using Skype Collaboration via Skype in the Classroom. In the campaign, pupils would talk about the danger of plastics, how to reduce and reuse plastics, demonstration, and activities to increase awareness about plastic pollution. The session was led by the pupils as teacher acts as facilitators. Everything was done in the target language which was English. Pupils interacted with other pupils from other schools. At the end of the awareness campaign, the teacher conducted an interview. The responses were then analyzed.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

The main data collected was the participants' interview transcripts. The transcripts were analyzed to explore pupils' perception towards the Skype in the Classroom session conducted. Moreover, the interview aims to understand the pupils' experience in speaking via Skype in the Classroom. Data is presented in written form with the help of excerpts from the transcripts. All names reported were pseudonyms. A video of the Skype in the Classroom session was recorded and analyzed by the researcher. Observation from the video were presented in written form to further support the findings from the interview conducted.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Pupils' Experience and Perception with Skype in the Classroom

Based on the responses received from the interview conducted and observation by the researcher, advantages of Skype in the Classroom to develop speaking skill were identified and placed under four different themes mainly; (1) confidence to speak in English, (2) improved social interaction skill, (3) peer support and feedback, and (4) motivation to learn English.

Confidence to speak in English

During the Skype in the Classroom session in which pupils communicated in the target language, they agreed that they were more confident to speak in English. All this while they said that they were anxious and embarrassed to use the language as they were afraid of making mistakes. However, seeing other pupils from different parts of Malaysia having trouble and stuttered to mumble out words, they became more comfortable to use the language. They realized that it was normal to make mistakes. It was observed that pupils became confident and better speakers when they were in an English-speaking environment.

"I like Skype (Skype in the Classroom) because I can speak English." (Ahmad)

"I like to ask questions...I like it too when they (other pupils) ask me questions." (Siva)

"Other people (pupils) speak (made mistakes) just like me." (Hazwan)

Having the knowledge on what to talk about during the awareness campaign via Skype in the Classroom also helped the participants to reduce their anxiety level. However, it must be noted that pupils did require longer time to respond to questions.

Improved Social Interaction Skill

Skype in the Classroom lacked the physical presence of classroom and other pupils. However, the shift from the traditional classroom setting to a virtual learning environment proved to be dividend as pupils became more focus, pupils were more confident to speak in front of a laptop rather than in front of a crowd and it helped them build new relationships with pupils from the other side of the country. Being digital natives, they were used to having conversation via the internet through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, having a specific topic to talk about and sharing the same interest had great impact on pupils' social interaction ability. Skype in the Classroom as an internet communication tool provided the opportunity of virtual social interaction.

"It is fun talking to people I don't know." (Ahmad)

"I like Skype because I can speak English with other people, my friends (classmates) can only speak Malay." (Alya)

"After the video call (Skype in the Classroom) we give (exchanged) our Instagram name." (Siva)

"I have a friend from Sabah now." (Syauqina)

The pupils were not used to speaking with people of different race. During the Skype in the Classroom awareness campaign, participants of the project came from different races and backgrounds. Besides sharing about the danger of plastic, it was observed that the pupils exchanged questions about different races. This showed that Skype in the Classroom can bridge the gap between races without the need of sitting in the same physical room.

Peer Support and Feedback

Through analysis of the recording of the Skype in the Classroom session, it was interesting to see that pupils were intervening into the conversations. One of the pupils had better proficiency in English and was seen constantly intervening into her friends' speech. The pupil (Valencia) was helping other pupils to speak and answering questions. Whenever they were pausing for long period of time or making vocabulary mistakes, she will dictate and correct the pupils' mistakes. For example, one pupil was introducing himself by saying "I live in Kuala Lumpur." Surprisingly, Valencia was quick to correct the mistake. These pupil to pupil interactions were absent in a normal classroom setting. The mediation process only occurred during the Skype in the Classroom session where they interact among themselves to construct language. The interaction during the session did not follow the traditional classroom teacher-pupil interaction. Skype in the Classroom stimulated communicative situations and provided a real purpose for pupils to respond. Pupils responded (interview) that they were comfortable and did not mind being corrected by their peers. They further explained that it was because they don't feel like they were in a normal classroom but in a real-life conversation.

"I am not shy (embarrass) if she (Valencia) correct my wrong (mistakes)." (Nasuha)

"In class, I need to ask for the teacher's permission before I speak (intervene into the conversation) but in Skype I can just speak." (Valencia)

"You (teacher) speak less when Skype in the Classroom." (Putera)

Motivation to Learn English

The pupils found that the awareness campaign project via Skype in the Classroom was more interesting in comparison to a normal classroom lesson. They further add that they did not feel pressured to complete tasks, worksheets and answering teacher's questions. From the recording, the pupils looked comfortable, they smiled a lot and stick to their roles exceptionally. Skype in the Classroom instilled intrinsic motivation among the pupils. Pupils agreed that the awareness campaign project via Skype in the Classroom was challenging themselves, interesting and different from what was being taught in the classroom. They felt privileged to be chosen to be part of such project. One pupil even commented that it was the best activity she ever took part in her six year of primary schooling. Being able to communicate with pupils from different schools was the highlight of the project. Some of the pupils even requested for another Skype in the Classroom session with pupils from other countries.

"Skype lesson (Skype in the Classroom is fun and interesting." (Syauqina)

"I hope that I can join (participate) Skype in the Classroom next time." (Alya)

"Skype in the Classroom is hard because I have to speak but I like it because I don't have to write and there is no homework." (Valencia)

"Do they have Skype in the Classroom in secondary school?" (Syauqina)

B. Challenges and Limitations of Skype in the Classroom

Based on the analysis of the recording, responses from the interview and the process of conducting this mini case study, it can be concluded that there are three challenges and limitations of Skype in the Classroom. There challenges are; (1) internet connectivity, (2) schools' participation and (3) time differences.

Internet Connectivity

Malaysian Education system has definitely moved towards 21st century learning. In 2011, the Ministry of Education and YTL Network had signed a memorandum of understanding to provide schools in Malaysia with access to internet. However, although most schools in Malaysia are equipped with internet access, the speed and connectivity of the said internet connection are far from satisfying. Skype in the Classroom can only work with a stable and fast internet connectivity. Multiple times during the Skype in the Classroom session, the video stalled, voice could not be heard and worst of all the connection disconnected. This did not stop teachers from continuing the session. There was one school in rural Sabah where the teacher decided to use her own internet so that the connection remain stable. After 30 minutes the teachers were able to rectify the problem and the session was conducted smoothly.

"I could not hear (clearly) what she is talking about." (Syauqina)

"I can't see the picture (shown by other pupils)." (Siva)

Schools' Participation

In order to attract participation from other schools, the pupils and teacher decided to create a Sway page. The page was then sent through multiple social media platforms. However, with the small Microsoft Educator community in Malaysia, the teacher struggled to have schools to participate. The short period of time from the time the page was posted, and the date of the session did not help either. In the end, the teacher had to postpone the date of the Skype in the Classroom session and ultimately managed to get six schools around Malaysia to participate.

Time Differences

The third challenge encountered was time differences between countries. The researcher did receive a few requests from foreign schools interested to participate in the campaign. However, due to time differences between the countries, the researcher had to reject the request. If the researcher were to accept the request, the session would have to be conducted during night time and the logistics involved in having pupils to stay back at school until night was too big. The pupils however were interested to communicate with foreign speakers.

"Can we have schools from Japan?" (Valencia)

"Can Korea people (Korean) speak English like us?" (Syauqina)

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project or short-term case study aimed at exploring the perceptions of pupils towards Skype in the Classroom as a tool to develop speaking skills. Apart from that this study also explored the challenges faced to prepare and conduct a Skype in the Classroom lesson. This study adds to the existing literature which discussed the use of digital tools to develop speaking skills and reduce language learning anxiety. The data findings suggested that Skype in the Classroom present as an internet communication tool helped to create an authentic learning experience in which pupils speak in the target language with low anxiety. Although it is not the perfect language acquisition tool, Skype in the Classroom was able to eliminate some of the constraint present in a language learning speaking lesson. Skype in the Classroom changed the dynamic of a traditional classroom to a virtual collaborative learning environment. This study is hope to give better understanding for educators to use online communication tool as a second language learning tool.

Last but not least, it must be emphasized that this study only focuses at one part of the language skill. Further research needs to be conducted on the usage of Skype in the Classroom on listening, reading and writing. This study only targeted primary schools within Malaysia with a small number of respondents. A larger pool of respondents is needed to increase the validity and reliability of the study. Hopefully, further research would help educators in the usage of digital tools in language learning.

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