

**THE EFFECTS OF ORAL COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY TRAINING AND METACOGNITIVE
AWARENESS STRATEGY TRAINING ON FORM
FOUR STUDENTS' ESL SPEAKING
PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN KEDAH**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

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**Thesis is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CS	Oral communication strategy training
CSMK	Oral Communication Strategy and Metacognitive Strategy Awareness for Speaking Training
EIL	English as an International Language
ELT	English language teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
KBSM	National School Curriculum that is in use in Malaysia for secondary schools
L1	First language/ Mother Tongue
L2	Second Language
MK	Metacognitive awareness strategy for speaking training
OCS	Oral communication strategies
OCSI	Oral communication strategies inventory
PMR	National level lower secondary examination in Malaysia
SBOET	Malaysian School Based Oral English Test (SBOET) adapted from Sidhu G. K. & Chan, Y. K. (2011)
SPM	National level upper secondary examination in Malaysia
T	Control Group
TL	Target language

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS

- Tarsame Singh. (2007, July). *Strategy and knowledge for better speaking performance in English in the Malaysian context*. Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Literacy 2007, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2008, February). *Strategy and knowledge for better speaking performance in English in the Malaysian context*. Paper presented at the National Conference on Skills and Competencies in Education 2008., USM, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2008, May). *Strategies for better speaking performance in English in the Malaysian context*. Paper presented at the 17th MELTA International Conference, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2008, October). *Strategy and knowledge for better speaking performance in English in the Malaysian context*. Paper presented at the 3rd International Language Learning Conference, USM, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2010 October). *Striking the right balance of strategies to enhance speaking skills among Malaysian ESL students*. Paper presented at the 2nd Student-led Postgraduate Colloquium, USM, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2011 December). *A quasi-experimental study on the effect of language learning strategies in enhancing speaking skills among Malaysian ESL students: controlling the extraneous variables*. Paper presented at the 1st Student-led Postgraduate Symposium, USM, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2011 June). *Striking the right balance of strategies to enhance speaking skills among Malaysian ESL students*. Paper presented at the 20th MELTA International Conference, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2011 November). *Blending explicit strategy training with interaction tasks to enhance speaking skills*. Paper presented at the The Biennial International Conference on Teaching & Learning of English in Asia: Forging ahead, Penang, Malaysia.
- Tarsame Singh. (2011 October). *Time-out from learning activities: Explicit strategy training to enhance speaking skills*. Paper presented at the 2011 Asian Literacy Conference, Penang, Malaysia.

KESAN LATIHAN STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI LISAN SERTA KESEDARAN STRATEGI METAKOGNITIF TERHADAP PENCAPAIAN PERTUTURAN BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR TINGKATAN EMPAT DI SEKOLAH TERPILIH DI KEDAH

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji sama ada strategi komunikasi lisan dan kesedaran strategi metakognitif dalam pertuturan berkesan dalam meningkatkan pencapaian, kadar penghasilan perkataan, penggunaan strategi komunikasi lisan serta tahap kesedaran strategi metakognitif dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah di Malaysia, yang belajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 199 orang pelajar dari tiga buah sekolah menengah di sebuah negeri di Utara Semenanjung Malaysia. Pelajar ini dibahagikan dalam 3 kumpulan kajian. –Kumpulan pertama diajar bertutur menggunakan CSMK, yang merupakan gabungan daripada latihan strategi komunikasi (CS) lisan serta kesedaran strategi metakognitif. Kumpulan kedua pula diajar bertutur menggunakan latihan strategi komunikasi lisan, manakala kumpulan kawalan (T) tidak didedahkan kepada sebarang jenis latihan khusus. Strategi berasaskan arahan (CSMK & CS) dan kaedah biasa (T) adalah pemboleh ubah bebas. Sementara itu, pencapaian pertuturan (SP), kadar penghasilan perkataan (SPR) dan kesedaran strategi metakognitif (MKA) adalah pemboleh ubah bersandar, Data kajian dikumpulkan sebelum dan selepas eksperimen melalui ujian pertuturan, data korpus berdasarkan transkrip, strategi komunikasi lisan menggunakan soal selidik (OCSU), MKA bagi soal selidik pertuturan dan protokol lisan retrospektif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pencapaian kumpulan CS adalah lebih baik berbanding dengan dua kumpulan lain, dari segi pencapaian pertuturan, kadar penghasilan perkataan, penggunaan strategi komunikasi lisan dan kesedaran strategi metakognitif. Dapatan kajian ini adalah serasi dengan dapatan daripada beberapa kajian yang berkaitan, yang mencadangkan bahawa strategi komunikasi lisan boleh membantu pelajar ESL dalam meningkatkan kemahiran pertuturan mereka.

THE EFFECTS OF ORAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TRAINING AND METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS STRATEGY TRAINING ON FORM FOUR STUDENTS' ESL SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KEDAH

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether oral communication strategies and metacognitive awareness strategies for speaking would be effective in enhancing speaking performance, speech production rate, oral communication strategy use and level of metacognitive awareness strategies of Malaysian ESL secondary students. The sample of the study consisted of 199 students in 3 secondary schools in a northern state of Peninsula Malaysia. Students were formed into 3 intact groups. The first experimental group was taught speaking using CSMK based instructions method which comprise of oral communication strategy training (CS) and metacognitive awareness strategies for speaking. The second experimental group was taught speaking using the oral communication strategy training while the control group (T) did not undergo any special training apart from their regular teaching and learning process. The strategy based instructions (CSMK & CS) and regular method (T) are the independent variables, whereas speaking performance (SP), speech production rate (SPR), oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and metacognitive awareness strategy for speaking (MKA) are the dependent variables, the target of strategy based instructions. The data for this study was collected before and after the quasi-experiment through speaking test, corpus data based on the transcripts, oral communication strategy use questionnaire (OCSU), metacognitive awareness strategy for speaking checklist (MKA) and retrospective verbal protocol. The results show that CS group performed better than CSMK and T with reference to speaking performance, speech production rate, oral communication strategy use and metacognitive awareness strategy for speaking. The results are congruent with some related strategy-based training studies which suggest that oral communication strategies has a positive impact on enhancing ESL students speaking proficiency.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The research aims to study the effects of explicit strategy training among students in selected secondary schools in a northern state of Malaysia. Students were immersed in two language learning strategies termed as oral communication strategy training (CS) and metacognitive awareness strategy training for speaking (MK) over a period of time. The scope of this research entails the Form Four students in Malaysia. In this chapter, the policy, history, current developments and the importance of speaking skills with reference to ELT in Malaysia will be presented. Subsequently, the statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study will also be highlighted.

1.2 Overview of the study

This study examines the effect of metacognitive and oral communication strategy training on students of selected secondary schools in the state of Kedah in Malaysia. Oral communication ability of the students will be evaluated using the school-based oral assessment tools. In this section, a brief explanation about metacognitive strategies, oral communication strategies and school-based oral assessment will be presented.

Metacognitive strategies helps “learners to consciously use their interlanguage system to control their performance and to maintain interaction” during a speaking task (Nakatani, 2006, p.87). When speaking a second language it involves planning, monitoring and checking the utterances produced to perform a task (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Hence, by raising awareness in managing and supervising specific strategy use, learners will be able to

utilize and develop their strategic competence and work towards being autonomous in their speaking ability. Eventually, learners will be able to plan, monitor and evaluate their interactions in the real-world contexts using English language.

Oral communication strategies are communication strategies that help learners participate in oral interaction activities based on the task requirements. Oral communication strategies act as a backup system as in a computer configuration by compensating for breakdowns in learner-learner interaction. Brown (2001, p.127) argues that recent approaches towards the nature of communication strategies are inclined towards “strategic competence in which learners bring to bear all possible facets of their growing competence in order to send clear messages in the second language”.

The school-based oral assessment implemented in 2002 comprises of four models of assessment which will be carried out during the fourth and fifth years of the secondary school students. The four models are,

- a) Individual: in this model there is only one-way communication between the candidate and the assessor (teacher)
- b) Teacher-Candidate: in this model the candidate interacts with the teacher where the teacher’s role is to prompt or provide minimal guidance during interaction
- c) Pair-work: in this model the candidates interact with their peers and the teacher facilitates the interaction
- d) Group Work: in this model 3 or 4 candidates interact in a group while the teacher assesses their performance

In this study, the researcher will utilize the third model where students work in pairs with their peers and assess them using the criteria outlined by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate for the pilot study. This is in line with Bao Dat (2003, p.375) view that

speaking skills are best developed when learners learn eventually to take control of their own performance from an insider perspective (e.g., from that of the learner), rather than being constantly dictated to by an outsider manipulation (e.g., by the teacher).

The findings of this study will be a significant contribution to the use of strategy-based instruction in enhancing English Language speaking competency among secondary schools.

1.3 ELT in Malaysia

English language today is undeniably highly sought after as an internationally commodity “sometimes referred to as World English or English as an International Language (EIL)...which can be acquired without any of the cultural trappings that go with it” (Richards, 2003). The relevance of cultural values of the English –speaking world as in Britain or US only applies when there is “a pragmatic need for such information” (Richards, 2003). Indeed, the native-speaker variety of English or ‘received pronunciation’ target for learning is more of a personal choice for learners in Malaysia who are exposed to the American, British, Australian and other local varieties over the electronic media.

Accordingly, English language today is recognized as an important second language in Malaysia. Communication skills in English language teaching (ELT) scene which traditionally was biased towards writing and other educational policy matters were stumbling blocks towards the development of fluent speakers of English. A major shift in thinking in the recent years about the nature of speaking and approaches to teaching have brought speaking into the limelight again as the major focus of ELT in Malaysia (Richards, 2003).

Since the 1950s, English Language Education in Malaysia is governed by the political situation and national aspirations of the nation. This period (1950-1960) is significant because it describes how policies were charted in a true Malaysian spirit by Malaysians. A select committee which comprised of representatives of various ethnic groups reviewed the education policy under the patronage of the then Education Minister Dato' Abdul Razak. (Pandian, 2001, p.71). In line with objectives of the Razak Report (1956) which was to form schools with a Malayan flavour, the report recommended Bahasa Melayu as the national language and English language was given recognition as a compulsory subject for all primary and secondary schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001, p.8). However, after ten years English was relegated from the mainstream medium of instruction to the status of second language in Peninsula Malaysia in 1967 followed by Sabah in 1973 and Sarawak in 1985 (Pandian, 2001, p.71).

The flexibility given the English Medium Schools, the Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools adopting different medium of instruction did not blend well in instilling the much sought after patriotism feeling among multi-ethnic Malaysians. In fact the Education Act of 1961, as a result of the Rahman Talib Report (1960) empowered the education minister to change the medium of instruction at primary schools if necessary (Pandian, 2001, p.72). One of the principal features of the report was the use of a common official language for all public examinations in secondary schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001, p.10). The minister then announced the conversion of English medium schools to Malay medium schools beginning January 1970. By the time Bahasa Malaysia had been modernized to meet the demands of primary, secondary and tertiary level demands, a cabinet committee was set up to study the implementation of education system in 1974 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001, p.12). Among the key features of the Cabinet Report (1979) was "education as a tool to produce trained workforce for the nation" (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2001, p.12) which refers to the importance of English as a language for science and

technology. Since then, the English language field had gone through myriads of change in terms of teaching and learning approach at all levels of the education sector.

The school syllabuses used in 1969 to post -1970 promoted the use of the structural – situational method with emphasis on oral exercises (Pandian, 2003, p.271). In 1979, the English Language Syllabus in Malaysian Schools Form Four –Form Five which adopted the task-oriented situational approach was implemented. The focus of this syllabus was still very much on communication as the previous syllabus. Adjusting their sails according the waves of methodological research and development the ELT scene in Malaysia witnessed a phase where three different approaches were employed. By 1983, the primary school syllabus adopted a structural-situational approach, the lower secondary English syllabus was based on a contextual base to teaching structures and the upper secondary employed a communicative syllabus.

In view of the disparity in approaches from first year of schooling to Form Five, a new syllabus was introduced for primary schools in 1983 and secondary schools in 1989 respectively. The primary syllabus focused on the acquisition of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. The teaching approach was activity based and it involved group work and graded task for students of different leaning ability.

The secondary syllabus was infused with the aspect of moral and spiritual values into the teaching and learning mechanism. Hence, the KBSM (1989) syllabus focused on reading, writing, listening and speaking skills based on the communicative approach. Despite all the interesting features and approaches outlined in the syllabus classroom practitioners still walked on the tight rope set by the public examination. The format of the paper and the syllabus did not match, the examination construct heavily depended on writing and reading comprehension task, which does not match the teaching and learning approach recommended in the syllabus content.

Declining trends of PMR English language achievement among lower secondary students in 1999 and year 2000 (Pandian, 2001, p.74) and the similar fate facing higher institution students who are products of the school system called for immediate measures to contain the situation. Based on newspaper reports gathered, Pandian attributes four major factors as a probable cause for deterioration in standards which are, students, parents, teachers and methodology. In addition, Rajaretnam & Nalliah (1999) cited in Pandian, (2002, p.48) found the construction of the syllabus to be less adaptable to non-English speaking learners who lacks exposure to the language. In view of the decline in English standards, the Education Ministry's Parliament secretary Mahadzir Mohd Khir identified the need to upgrade teacher training programmes, language teaching methodology and quality of textbooks (Study on poor English in schools, 2000).

In year 2000, the English syllabus took another wave of change by introducing a revised syllabus which aims to extend learners' English language proficiency in order to meet their needs to use English in everyday life, for knowledge acquisition and for future workplace.

The new features in revised 'KBSM' syllabus are the functional use of language in everyday life and the emphasis on learning outcomes to enable students to use the language effectively. A small literature component is introduced comprising of poetry and short stories and novels to encourage reading habits among Malaysian ESL learners.

In line with its status as a second language, English is a compulsory subject in all primary and secondary schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000, p.1). Students are taught English from 600 to 800 minutes per week in schools. Today English has been adopted as a medium of instruction for teaching of Mathematics and Science at primary and

secondary schools; thus, indicating a positive trend towards the use of English language in schools and at the tertiary level.

In tandem, the English syllabus for secondary schools which (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000, p.2)

aims to extend learners' English language proficiency in order to meet their needs to use English in everyday life, for knowledge acquisition , and for future workplace needs.

An investigation into the washback effects of the SPM 1119 paper on teaching (Siong, L.K. & Fei, W.F., 2003) showed positive effects on task-based lessons and focus on teaching of reading and writing skills. Teachers according to some researchers, resort to taking steps such as substituted practice at exam-mimicking exercises, for real teaching of skills, thus depriving certain group of students a chance to learn all the skills. In addition, Siong, L.K. & Fei, W. F. state that the examination washback effect on teaching in the classroom defeats the Education Ministry's objective to motivate weaker students to improve their proficiency in English language. Ironically, the onus of teaching language has moved away from the whole idea of teaching language which ultimately is to help the learners communicate in the real world in the target language. Students literacy is not solely based on their ability to read and write but also speak and listen, i.e. to

- ✓to formulate , clarify and express ideas
 - ✓adapt speech to a widening range of circumstances and demands
 - ✓listen, understand and respond appropriately to others
 - ✓show presentational skills: accurate punctuation, correct spelling and legible handwriting; and
 - ✓use a widening variety of forms for different purposes and audiences
- (Subramaniam & Shahizah, 2005, pp.vii-viii)

The Ministry of Education, in view of the above issues placed acquisition of competencies, use and transmission of knowledge in the English language as a primary goal in a continuous process.

“The school –based oral assessment in the year 2002 bears immediate testimony” (Subramaniam & Shahizah, 2005, p.viii) to the development and enhancement of English language oral competency along the lines of communicative language teaching approach.

Besides, introducing the school- based oral examination, providing self-access CD-ROMs with the newly released textbooks (normally revised every five years) and teaching courseware. The CD- ROMs consist of all the major skills of English along with audio and video samples of real life interaction.

Washback effect of examination format has suppressed the importance of spoken form for many years (Fauziah Hassan & Nita Fauzee Selamat, 2002) until a concerted effort to introduce school based oral examination was introduced in 2003. This new format requires students to be evaluated for a number of times over the years and eventually a grade is awarded based on their performance.

The policy makers in Malaysia had been neglecting the spoken form from the day English has been introduced as a compulsory subject for primary and secondary schools. The onus has been on writing form due to the validity and reliability in testing and evaluation process. However, the spate of events in the country brought about a change in the mindset of the major stakeholders.

The current perspective of education in Malaysia is steadily moving towards process-based learning across the curriculum and English language teaching. In concordance, the Ministry of Education introduced a new format for oral assessment after realizing that previous format was artificial and not authentic enough to show the student’s real ability in the spoken form. Furthermore the oral performance was merely based on the ten minutes allocated for assessment purpose only.

The 'Bahasa Melayu' and English Language National Committee agreed to change the format for oral examination at SPM level in 2003 based on a working paper that was submitted by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2002). The school based oral examination aims to mould students that can be better and appropriate impromptu speakers in various situations. The new format should be conducted continuously during the teaching and learning process in school. In consonant with reformation in testing oral proficiency, Lee & VanPatten postulates that,

testing learners' communicative ability can have a positive washback effect on instruction. If there is to be an oral test with content related to classroom activities, learners will have additional motivation not only to participate in the class but to strive to improve their communication ability.

(2003, p.114)

The new format is student-friendly and authentic because it is able to assess the actual ability of students in a non-threatening atmosphere. As a result, it helps to promote the teaching and of speaking skills in the classroom. It is stipulated that assessment should be carried out throughout the two years of the students' upper secondary period. The students are able to show and present their true ability in speaking because they are not assessed in a threatening atmosphere by a total stranger as in the previous assessment format. Various speaking skills would be addressed by more than one assessor according to the syllabus content or student's interest. In introducing the new syllabus format the Ministry had taken into consideration the validity, practicality, quality and curriculum needs.

Educational emphases namely "learning how to learn" in the current secondary school English Language syllabus (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000, pp.14-15) advocates teaching of learning strategies and promotes autonomous learning processes.

Learner autonomy is recommended as the best way to improve the students' results in the speaking examination. Sharifah Sheha Syed Aziz (2005, p.97) states that "the very best result comes with their own effort to upgrade themselves in the speaking skills."

Learner development is a learner-centred innovation in foreign and second language instruction which “responds to learner diversity by aiming to improve the language learners’ ability to learn a language”. (Wenden, 2002, p.32)

Cognitive approach in the acquisition and application of knowledge emphasizes mental structure or organization with the notion that the individual is active, constructive and planful (McLaughlin, 1990). Cognitive processing in language learning deals with different components of memory namely working memory and long term memory to explain language –acquisition processes. Anderson (1983) cited in Macaro (2003, p.44) in his Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) model defines long term memory as a combination of declarative knowledge (knowledge that is known as a fact - the ‘what’ and ‘that’) and procedural knowledge (knowledge of ‘how to do’).

The transition from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge is an important theory underpinning research on learning strategies.

(Macaro, 2003, p.44)

Metacognitive, cognitive and sociaffective strategy training on different language skills indicated a significant effect on speaking skills in a study conducted by O’ Malley (1985). Strategy training significantly improved oral test scores compared to students who did not undergo the training reports Nakatani (2005, p.87); furthermore, transcription analysis of the discourse shows longer utterances being produced by students. This indicates that strategy training has an impact on learners’ speaking performance.

Therefore, in the next section, the researcher will discuss the importance of mastering speaking skills based on related research and literature on oral communication.

1.4 The importance of speaking as one of the language skills

Speaking is the key to mastering the other 3 equally important skills in English language learning as Lyle (1993) reiterates that speech helps children in organising their thinking and focusing their ideas. She posits that L2 learning process in learners from the outset begins with speaking skills, when learners talk about their experiences or about themselves.

If speaking skills are neglected in the classroom teaching and learning process it will destroy the foundation and hinder the mastery of the other language skills (Zhang & Alex, 1995). In the context of language acquisition, as in our first language as we grow, our listening and speaking abilities develop first followed by reading and writing skills. “This validates the hypothesis that oracy is prerequisite to literacy” (Ganakumaran & Shahizah, 2005, p.vii). In fact learners in primary grades generally do more listening and speaking compared to reading and writing. There are many reasons cited in the literature to show that the “wide-ranging communicative potential of oral language is fundamental” (Ganakumaran & Shahizah, 2005, p.vii).

A study conducted among university undergraduates, shows that they are way behind in achieving the aims of secondary school English language syllabus in Malaysia. Employers, according to Khairi Izwan (1993) as cited in Hamidah Yamat, Melor Md Yunus, Norzaini Azman & Juriah Long found their employees lacking in communicative skills in their interaction with English-speaking clients. The study reveals that students are not proficient in English at tertiary level. The results show that students felt they are incompetent in the speaking and writing and they were weaker in speaking skill compared to writing. In reaction to the findings Hamidah Yamat, Melor Md Yunus, Norzaini Azman & Juriah Long, (2003) asserts that our present education system at all levels needs to be looked into especially at the tertiary level.

The majority of the students' language learning years are spent in primary and secondary schools. Despite noble efforts by the policy makers to conduct certain core subjects at school and tertiary level in English, the education sector still has to reflect on the teaching practice of English language at schools in Malaysia with regard to speaking skills. Findings show that speaking has been identified as the "learner's weakest skill" by a number of studies conducted among secondary school students (Fauziah Hassan & Nita Fauzee, 2002, Jamali Ismail & Hasliza Aris, 2002, Lim, 1994).

Similarly, the main aim of teaching English in Malaysian schools is for learners to use for communication outside the country. In order to communicate with foreigners we need to master the varieties of English around the world and for internal communication as in Malaysia, the national language, Bahasa Malaysia plays a major role.

A study conducted by Jamali Ismail and Hasliza Aris (2002) in 1995 with regard to the ESL learners' self-perception on the need to speak English in Malaysia shows that students from secondary schools in Selangor while reporting on their proficiency level perceived themselves to be weaker in speaking skills and writing skills. Students reported that

English is an interesting subject and they want to be able to speak English fluently. Most of them also felt that it is important for our leaders to converse in English well. (Jamali Ismail & Hasliza Aris, 2002, p.35)

The respondents ranked speaking as the most important skill followed by reading, listening and writing. Learners reported that they are fairly able in spoken English compared to other skills and this depicts the real situation in Malaysia. Students with excellent results in English language are unable to perform well in oral communication skills.

Learners' attitude towards ability to speak English shows that 93.7 % wished they could speak English fluently like other people. They strongly feel that our leaders should be

able to speak English well. The study also shows that a majority of them are generally strong in their motivational intensity to learn English and 87.1 % of them feel that they would enrol for listening and speaking courses to improve their English. This is compared to 84.5 % who will do the same for reading and writing skills.

Jamali Ismail and Hasliza Aris (2002) suggested some ways on how the teacher or the school authority could help students' exposure towards English with little focus on the learner autonomy aspect. The suggestions are mainly teacher-centred and might not help learners to be independent or life-long speakers of English. In fact, a majority of the students in a northern state of Peninsula Malaysia who showed positive attitudes in learning English feel that "they are personally responsible for their success in learning English" (Karrupiah, 2005, p. 185). She posits that student-centred activities should be encouraged to overcome the lack of practice in reading, writing and speaking.

Taking into account the positive attitude as well as the problems faced in learning English, motivational intensity and sense of responsibility of students, research into strategy training is worth looking into to address the lack of proficiency as well as the problems faced in speaking skills. This is in line with the current practice of skill-based teaching which is shifting towards strategy-based teaching where learners could be trained to take charge of their own learning via language learning strategies.

This view is supported by a survey carried out on second-language research in England where teachers felt that speaking was the most important skill that researchers should illuminate despite the two decades of adopting communicative language teaching approaches: "Certainly, secondary classrooms are filled to the brim with oral interaction, especially in the lower secondary" (Macaro, 2003, p.6). Another point to note is the age level that teachers perceived critical in this survey was post 16, towards acquiring A-level qualification.

In tandem with the general findings, Macaro highlights the value of strategy awareness and strategy training in speaking tasks in “improving the performance of speaking although it may only help to develop competence in an indirect way” (2003, p.215).

One of the most crucial implications of the positive findings is that teachers need to develop, or need to be trained to incorporate, strategy instruction into their interaction (as an implicit form of instruction) and into ‘time –out from learning’ activities in more explicit forms of strategy training.

(Macaro, p.215)

Thus, an instructional programme which incorporates metacognitive strategies for speaking skills should be developed to address the issue of limited exposure and practice in speaking English at Form Four, which is mainly confined to English lessons. Packages which comprise of different combinations of subjects offered by national type, technical, or boarding schools at Form Four determines whether students have access to content subjects which are conducted in English such as Mathematics, Science, Additional Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Chemistry and some technical subjects. The teachers should adopt an approach which can support learners’ development of speaking skills and help them manage their learning process constructively.

Hence, in the next section, the researcher will deliberate on pressing need to study the impact of strategy-based training to enhance secondary school students speaking skills performance.

1.5 Statement of the problem

At secondary school level, Form Four students in selected schools in the state of Kedah in Malaysia reported that they strongly believe (97.3 %) that interacting with their friends in spoken English “will help them improve their English” proficiency but on the other hand 73.9% of the students reported that they “rarely or sometimes speak in English with their friends” (Karrupiah, 2005, p.149).

In addition to that, despite being exposed to English Language from primary school at the age of seven, the majority of the students at Form Four level (between sixteen to seventeen years old) reported that their “ability in spoken English is far from satisfactory” in the state of Selangor, in Malaysia (Jamali Ismail & Hasliza Aris, 2002, p.41).

In the employment sector, figures stated by the Deputy Human Resources Minister show that 50,000 out the 90,000 unemployed were SPM school-leavers due to “attitude problems and the lack of soft skills such as communication skills” (Samy & Looi, 2006). The issue of poor oral communication skills has been highlighted in the mass media, parliamentary sessions and academic research papers as a common reason on why local graduates from tertiary level are unable to penetrate the employment market (Hamidah Yamat @ Ahmad et.al, 2003 & Aniswal Abd. Ghani et.al, 2005). In addition, employers stated that local graduates are unable to speak English and make an effective oral presentation (Aniswal Abd. Ghani , Munir Shuib & Haslina Haroon, 2005).

Many internal and external factors have been identified by researchers as the cause for poor command of speaking skills among learners of English in Malaysia. Lack of exposure and practice is the most commonly stated reason for poor oral communication skills among ESL learners in Malaysia (Jamali Ismail & Hasliza Aris, 2002, Sharifah Sheha, 2005, Too W. K., 2005, Lim, S. H. & Maya –Khemlani, D., 1995, Lim, S. L., 1994). Research findings show that only 11.65% of class time was spent on spoken skills in primary and secondary schools and the least emphasized in most of the cases (Lim, S. L. & Maya- Khemlani, D., 1995).

The production of second language speech is particularly difficult for ESL learners because of the complex cognitive skills which require “conscious internal mental activity” (Nakatani, 2005, p.77). Therefore, learners need to orchestrate a variety of communication strategies and manage them effectively to achieve their interactional goal.

Oral communication strategies studies, according to Nakatani & Goh (2007, p.211) were not conducted in classroom settings which makes “it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of negotiation on the development of TL proficiency in normal classroom situations”.

In addition to that, Nakatani & Goh stated that a meagre number of studies have used learner-learner interaction as their oral test. Semi-direct oral tests according to Nakatani & Goh fail to provide information on how interlocutors communicate in a conversation. Furthermore, Nakatani & Goh were not in favour of using students who were not their peers for learner-learner interaction oral test as this may affect their ability to interact due to other intervening variables. Nakatani & Goh reported that

To date, there have been few studies that have presented the validity and reliability of using student dyads for speaking tests. As there are few studies that examined the possible effect of proficiency level on the results of CS instruction, it is essential to explore this research area in future studies (2007, p.218)

Hence, it is viable to study the impact of speaking strategy-based instruction training programme among Malaysian secondary school ESL students in enhancing their speaking performance. The objectives of the study are outlined in the next section.

1.6 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are,

1. To investigate whether explicit classroom instruction of learning strategies has an effect on students’ speaking performance, speech production rate and strategy use among Form Four students in selected secondary schools in the state of Kedah

2. To investigate whether explicit instruction of learning strategies has an effect on students' speaking performance, speech production rate and strategy use among high-ability Form Four students in selected secondary schools in the state of Kedah
3. To investigate whether explicit instruction of learning strategies has an effect on students' speaking performance, speech production rate and strategy use among low-ability Form Four students in selected secondary schools in the state of Kedah
4. To examine the impact of different instructional methods on students' speaking performance, speech production rate and strategy use between high-ability and low-ability Form Four students in selected secondary schools in the state of Kedah
5. To find out students' perception on their performance in speaking test and oral communication strategy use.
6. To find out students' perception on their performance in speaking test and metacognitive awareness strategy level.

1.7 Research Questions

1. Are there significant differences in (a) speaking performance (SP), (b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) among students taught via CSMK instructional method, CS instructional method and T instructional method?
2. Are there significant differences in (a) speaking performance (SP), (b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) among high-ability

students taught via CSMK instructional method, CS instructional method and T instructional method?

3. Are there significant differences in (a) speaking performance (SP), (b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) among low-ability students taught via CSMK instructional method, CS instructional method and T instructional method?
4. Are the CS and MK instructional methods helpful for Form Four students to improve their (a) speaking performance (SP) ,(b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) and whether the instructional methods are negatively associated with proficiency level of students?
5. How do students perceive their test performance and oral communication strategy use in their retrospective verbal report protocols?
6. How do students perceive their test performance, oral communication strategy use with metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking in their retrospective verbal report protocols?

1.8 Hypotheses

Based on the quantitative research question1 to 4 the following hypotheses were formulated

1. There will be significant differences in (a) speaking performance (SP), (b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d)

metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) among students taught via CSMK instructional method, CS instructional method and T instructional method.

2. There will be significant differences in (a) speaking performance (SP), (b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) among high-ability students taught via CSMK instructional method, CS instructional method and T instructional method.
3. There will be significant differences in (a) speaking performance (SP), (b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) among low-ability students taught via CSMK instructional method, CS instructional method and T instructional method.
4. The instructional methods are helpful for Form four students to improve their (a) speaking performance (SP) ,(b) speech production rate (SPR), (c) oral communication strategy use (OCSU) and (d) metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking (MKA) and it is negatively associated with proficiency level.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses speaking skills which is one of the crucial skills in ESL teaching and learning continuum. In the same vein, performance in speaking skill is as one of the key indicators and oral communication is one of the perennial ELT issues confronting Malaysian learners at all levels of education, right from preschool to tertiary level leading into employment sector.

Theoretically, findings from this study will provide evidence to check on the rigour of “Cognitive framework for learner strategies” proposed by Macaro (2006, p.325). The success of interaction strategy as applied to speaking tasks promote L2 processes and translate towards L2 speaking skills that are measureable and observable will be investigated.

Review of metacognitive awareness raising training in speaking strategies and learner-learner interaction task has shown that strategy training has a beneficial effect for learners in ESL and EFL domains. Encouraging findings from this study would be helpful to convince ESL practitioners to adopt some of the ideas to train their students using oral communication strategies and metacognitive strategy awareness for speaking.

ESL teachers in Malaysian secondary schools could improve the speaking performance of their students resulting in better oral communication skills. On the other hand, students that are equipped with metacognitive awareness of speaking strategies would be able to apply the task specific and general strategies striving towards highly skilled ESL speakers. The strategies could also be adapted by practitioners from other levels of education sector to address the lack of oral communication ability among Malaysian ESL learners.

Pedagogically, the results of this study will convince teachers to move towards a more learner-centred teaching methodology taking into account the value of understanding learners’ learning process. Practitioners will be motivated to study their learners’ learning style and mould learning strategies for oral communication accordingly.

Evidence and findings from this study will be of great importance to education policy makers in Malaysia. In Malaysian school context, the curriculum developers play an important role in instructional design that is used at classroom level, therefore this study is significant because of its practical implications for curriculum developers to design

instructional or training materials for speaking strategies implementation in schools and institutions. Findings from this study will therefore enrich the existing repertoire of speaking and learning strategies that are incorporated in the curriculum.

Hence, it is inevitable that this study would also create an impact on the students that have participated actively as subjects. After undergoing the intervention, these students will be able to monitor their conversation or interaction in formal and informal situations, and perform better in their school-based oral assessment. This might indirectly motivate students to interact in English with their peers, teachers in school and in their daily routine with family or friends.

As the exposure and practice of interacting in English increases it will lead towards better oral proficiency performance among most of the school students who are about to embark on their tertiary education journey which has a high regard for oral communication in English.

1.10 Definitions of Key Terms

Strategic competence in this study refers to “the ability to manage communication not only during an interaction but also before and after interaction, in order to achieve an intended interactional goal” (Nakatani, 2005, p.77)

Communication strategies in this study refer to how “learners can improve communicative proficiency by developing an ability to use specific communication strategies to compensate for their target language deficiency” (Bialystok, 1990 & Dornyei, 1995 cited in Nakatani, 2006, p.151).

Oral Communication Strategies (OCS) is used in this study instead of *communication strategy* to avoid confusion. Oral communication strategies specifically focus on strategic behaviours that learners use when facing communication problems during interactional tasks” (Nakatani, 2006, p.152).

Metacognitive awareness strategies (MK) in this study refer to metacognitive awareness strategy training as proposed by Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1998. The students are trained to use metacognitive awareness strategies to cope with speaking activities. The strategies are divided into three stages, before speaking, while speaking and after speaking.

Instructional methods refer to the different training as in CS, CSMK and T groups. The kind of training that these groups underwent is explained in the next section.

Communication strategies training group (CS) refers to the group that underwent training using the Oral Communication Strategies as proposed by Nakatani (2006). Nakatani carried out this training among college students to see the impact of oral communication strategy training.

Communication strategies and metacognitive awareness strategy training group (CSMK) refers to the group that underwent training using the Oral Communication Strategies and Metacognitive Awareness Strategies.

Oral communication strategy use questionnaire (OCSU) refers to the questionnaire that has been adapted from Nakatani (2006) Oral Communication Strategy Inventory to quantify the use of oral communication strategies among students for speaking.

Metacognitive awareness strategy use for speaking checklist (MKA) is an adapted version of the checklist that has been compiled by C. Alcaya, K. Lybeck, & P. Mougel, teachers in the Experimental sections of the Speaking Strategies Experiment, NLRC/CARLA, University of Minnesota, November 1994. Cohen, Weaver & Li employed this checklist to study the impact of strategy-based instruction on speaking a foreign language among university students that were learning French as a foreign language.

School-based oral assessment (SBOA) is a formal assessment which comprises four models of assessment from individual task to group task. It was formally implemented in secondary schools in Malaysia in 2002. In this study, the second model which is pairwork (learner-learner interaction) will be adopted to check on students' speaking performance.

High-ability students are students whose average scores in the speaking test performance measured by pre test are above the median. Based on the report on pre intervention speaking performance students from the experimental and control group were categorised as high ability students, with scores above 22.

Low-ability students are students whose average scores in the speaking test performance measured by the pre test are below the median. Based on the report on pre intervention speaking performance students from the experimental and control group were categorised as low ability with scores below 22.

Scaffolding strategies instruction are “ways to provide additional support when students need it” or to “reduce the explicitness when students are ready” (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999, p.40). When students are able to apply the strategies in their interaction task, the additional support is gradually reduced.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The literature review will address the processes of learning a non native language using the broad term second language (L2) as Gass (2006) argues that there is a thin line between the mental processes involved in learning a second or a foreign language. The context available to learners might have significant differences in terms of quality and quantity of language material (Gass, p.44).

This chapter deals with the review of related literature describing the main models of language acquisition of oral communication in second language, the Universal Grammar model and the Cognitive Processing models which “have been interpreted by theoreticians and practitioners as operating essentially via listening and speaking” (Macaro, 2003, p.182).

2.2 Theoretical foundations of Speaking

The theoretical foundation and research evidence in relation to speaking in second language learning is still lingering over an

“overarching question...whether the target language is best learnt explicitly and consciously (focusing on the form of the language) or whether it is best learnt implicitly and subconsciously by actually using the language” (Macaro, 2003, p.182).

In speaking, ideally the implicit and subconscious dimension is naturally occurring although studies have shown that language can be mastered via extensive reading programmes. This overarching question relates to the four-way stretch of theories of second language acquisition (Macaro, p.22) as in Fig. 2.1.