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Speak Out Your Interest, Kids: Way to Enhance Speaking Skill

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Abstract

In this challenging era, learners should be well equipped with the essential skills of the 21st century which include having good communication and critical thinking skills. Thus, it is important for these skills to be instilled from the young age. This case study aims to show the effectiveness of implementing Pinterest in teaching English to a Malaysian preschool learner to enhance communication and critical thinking in ESL learning. The participant underwent a total of 6 speaking classes where three classes prior the intervention were done using flashcards and the other three classes were done with the implementation of Pinterest. The study found that the implementation of Pinterest was able to create a positive effect to the participant by increasing the ability to think critically as well as improving motivation and communication skill. Based on the findings, it could be summarized that the implementation of Pinterest for preschool ESL learning has the potential of producing confident speakers who can think critically and spontaneously. The result of this study is hoped to enlighten educators in using technology to create an effective preschool ESL learning environment.

Keywords: Pinterest, Preschool ESL, Emerging Technology, Technology in ESL

Introduction

In the 21st century education scene, it is crucial for learners to practice good communication and critical thinking in order to stand out in today's world of endless development and competition. Critical thinking is the process of reflecting and deep thinking carried out by learners when constructing knowledge (Saleh, 2018). It is important for teachers to stop practicing spoon-feeding in classrooms and start exposing learners to opportunities that enable them to think out of the box (Balloo et al., 2018). Hence, it is important for learners to be instilled with critical thinking during preschool so that they will not be left out when they enter the primary level (Mokhlis, 2019).

Communication on the other hand occurs when a person shares his or her feelings, ideas and opinions with others (Ahmad, 2019). In ESL learning, it is very important for learners to speak the language as a part of the learning process. One of the main objectives of ESL learning is to ensure that learners are able to convey messages that could be understood by others (Rao, 2019). According to Ahmad (2019), the communication process usually fails when

speakers could not express themselves clearly. Thus, it is important for young children to be exposed to ways of having good communication from preschool level so that they have more opportunities to practice and polish the skill. Having a good communication skill is vital in today's world as English serves the purpose of international communication (Rao, 2019).

Living in this era of constant advancement of technology, it is no longer sufficient for teaching and learning to be carried out solely in a teacher-centered manner. Learners today need to play a huge part in their own learning as it has been continuously proven that learners are able to learn better when they connect knowledge with their own lives' experiences (Tai & Wei, 2020). Based on Jean Piaget's constructivist view, he firmly believed that true learning occurs through the process of continuous self and knowledge construction. Thus, this case study employed the theory of constructivism which believes that learners gain knowledge and learn better when they relate knowledge to their lives' experiences (Sarbah, 2020).

The constructivism theory also encourages student-centered learning where teacher does not dominate the entire learning process but instead facilitate and guide learners to reach their own understanding (Lee & Tan, 2018). In this case study, the use of Pinterest is looked to boost Preschool ESL learners' competency by creating learning situations that encourage them to build on the existing knowledge or self experience. Based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development, children's learning process consist of the stages of assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium where they learn through their own experiences (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). In this particular study, the process of assimilation occurs when learners search for new information on Pinterest which later leads to the accommodation stage where students recall or analyze the information on Pinterest and relate them to their own experience. The equilibration takes place when learners try to 'balance' or make sense of the new information with their existing knowledge.

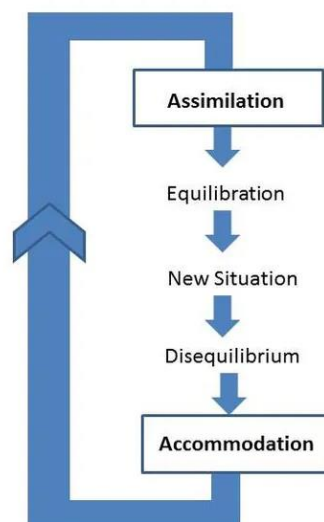


Fig. 1 Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development (McLeod, 2020)

Hence, in this case study, it is believed that the implementation of Pinterest is able to further enhance learners' cognitive development by allowing them to organize their thoughts in a more active manner. Through the features of the social media application, learners will be able to build on their existing knowledge and synthesize the information from Pinterest while critically and creatively analyzing them based on their existing knowledge and

experiences. This study believes that the implementation of Pinterest is able to spark interest among preschool ESL learners to think critically and eventually improve their communication skill. Babaee and Khoshhal (2016) mentioned that these processes are able to produce learners who think critically and rationally. It is important for teachers to acknowledge that learners come to class with various experience and existing knowledge. These existing knowledge and experiences have huge potentials of creating a better learning outcome when they are incorporated into the teaching and learning process (Wornyo, et al., 2018). Taber (2019) also agreed on this and believed that when learners' existing ideas are taken into account and are elaborated and demonstrated in a broader range, the teaching and learning can be carried out more effectively.

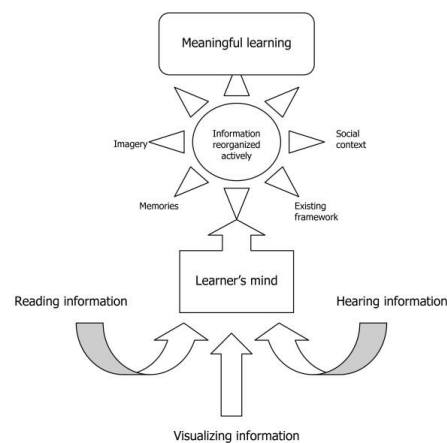


Fig. 2 Vygotsky's Constructivist learning theory (D'Antoni et al., 2010)

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to look at the effectiveness of implementing Pinterest to enhance preschool ESL learners' communication and critical thinking skills. Pinterest is a web and mobile application which enables its users to discover ideas through pictures and other visuals that could be gathered in one place for future reference (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2018). It works like a mind map but with a virtual pin board that allows users to sort, collect, and organize online items and are equipped with a personal online 'board,' where they can 'pin' items and categorize them based on any specific themes or topics (White, 2014). Abdullah et al. (2018) in their study mentioned that ESL learners are able to find and expand their ideas easily when using Pinterest. Hence, this study believes that Pinterest will help preschool ESL learners to gain and improve their critical thinking and communication skill.

In this case study, one participant of the age of five has been chosen to undergo a speaking course with a total of six classes. For the first three classes, the participant was introduced to the topics of 'On the farm', 'My birthday' and 'It is mealtime' which were taken from an activity book, Superstar Learners English 3 published by Penerbitan Pelangi Sdn. Bhd. From the topics, the participant was shown a set of flashcards in each respective week as a stimulus to stimulate a speaking activity.

The researcher then asked the participant to choose one flashcard of the participant's favorite animal, item at a birthday party and favorite food. Once the participant has chosen a flashcard, the researcher facilitated a critical thinking exercise by creating a mind map on a piece of paper. The participant then needed to think of a few words or phrases to describe the chosen item. No minimum or maximum number of words were specifically asked from the participant. The participant wrote down the words or phrases in the mind map with the guidance from the researcher. When the mind map was done, the participant described their favorite item verbally by referring to mind map.

For the remaining three classes, the researcher no longer used flashcard but instead facilitated the participant by implementing Pinterest. The researcher guided the participant to search pictures of an animal, dream birthday cake and favorite food using Pinterest. The participant was allowed to choose any pictures or videos to be pinned on three specified Pinterest boards. After the participant has done pinning, the researcher asked the participant to list out words or phrases in the 'Public note' section through the edit feature to describe the chosen items. After the participant was done listing out words or phrases in the section, the researcher asked the participant to verbally describe the item based on the board that have been created.

Results and Discussion

The researcher aimed to look at whether the implementation of Pinterest helps the learner to have better critical thinking and communication skills. The following table shows words and phrases that the participant used to describe the items chosen based on the topics of 'On the farm', 'My birthday' and 'It is mealtime'.

Table 1. Words/ Phrases used to describe items chosen

Topic	Item Chosen	Flashcards	Pinterest
'On the farm'	Cat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furry • Cute • It meows • It has tail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are cute • They are loving • It is funny • It is so fluffy • It likes to cuddle
'My birthday'	Cake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has toppings • It has candles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is like a colorful rainbow • It has a crown • It has a wand

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has beautiful flowers • It has a pretty girl • It is sweet and yummy • It has colorful sprinkles
'It is mealtime'	Ice cream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold • So many flavors • It has cone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The flavor is yummy and good • Allergic to chocolate • It looks big • Just like a colorful rainbow • The cone looks yummy • The ice cream is tall • Vanilla is my favorite • Ice cream looks delicious • It's not yummy

From the table above, it can be seen that the participant responds well to the implementation of Pinterest in terms of producing ideas to describe the items chosen in a more critical and creative way. The most significant improvement can be seen from the topic of 'It is mealtime' which the chosen item is ice cream.

During the class where the flashcards were used, the participant was excited and happy to see various types of food showed. When asked to choose one favorite food, the participant contemplated and said that there were three food flashcards that the participant liked the most. They were popsicle, pizza, and ice cream. The researcher then asked the participant to only choose one and the participant finally decided on ice cream. The researcher immediately asked the participant the reason ice cream was finally chosen while handing out a mind map. The participant was able to come up with three descriptions on the mind map. When asked to verbally describe the ice cream later during the class, the participant merely say the words and phrases that have been written on the mind map out loud.

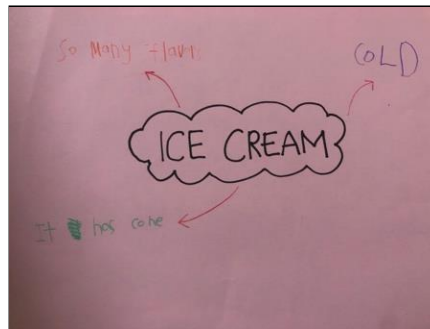


Fig. 2 Mind map on 'Ice cream'

Nonetheless, during a different class where the researcher implemented Pinterest, the researcher recapped the topic of 'It is mealtime' and revisited the participant's favorite food which was ice cream. The researcher had first created a blank board entitled 'My favorite food' on Pinterest. The researcher then guided the participant by tapping the search button and the participant then typed the word 'ice cream' in the search box with the help of the researcher. The participant was extremely ecstatic and excited to see endless options of photos and videos of ice creams available on Pinterest. The participant then chose and pinned a few photos and videos on the 'My favorite food' board.

When the participant was done choosing and pinning, the researcher asked the participant to look at each pinned item and describe it in the 'Public note' section in the edit feature. From the 'My favorite food board', the participant was able to describe a total of nine phrases from a total of five pins.

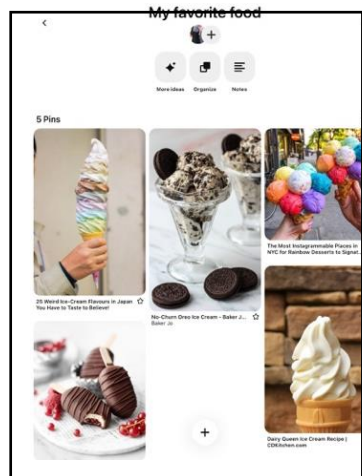


Fig. 3 'My favorite food' board with five pins on Pinterest

Later during the class, the participant was asked to verbally describe the item chosen. However, this time around, the participant enjoyed the oral presentation even more. It can be seen that the participant felt more comfortable. The participant did not re-read the 'Public note' section but was able to describe the ice cream as the participant looked at the completed board. Although the participant said most of the things that have been written on the board, there were also some things that were added spontaneously. For instance, when the participant was saying 'This one is a little bit not yummy', the participant then added 'because inside... there's something that... I don't like it but outside looks great'.

From the results, it can be said that the implementation of Pinterest was able to facilitate learners to broaden their thinking in a more critical and creative manner. The reason to this might strongly be due to the various and diverse options of photos and videos that are available on Pinterest. As mentioned by Philominraj et al (2017), visual aids help in making language real and alive while also keeping learners' attention and interest towards learning.

The results showed a positive outcome on critical thinking when the participant stated 'Allergic to chocolate' when referring to the chocolate ice cream pinned on the board. This shows that deep thinking occurred and the different visuals on the board triggered the participant to think beyond the picture and relating the subject to real life experience. According to Mohammed and Kinyo (2020), learning through learners' lives' experiences as suggested by the theory of constructivism will not only improve academic achievements but will also encourage continuous learning as well as longevity of knowledge learnt.

Raja (2017) stated that when speakers talk about things that is of their interest and are closely related to themselves or live experiences, they will feel more confident and comfortable. Although the participant was describing the same item prior the intervention, the participant was far more comfortable when describing the item based on the Pinterest board created. The opportunity of choosing photos and videos that they liked to be pinned on the board might have triggered their interest on the topic which eventually led them to expand ideas and opinions through critical thinking as compared to the limited options from flashcards.

It can also be said that the implementation of Pinterest helped in improving the participant's motivation to complete a task. When the participant was asked to verbally describe the item based on the mind map, the participant only said the words and phrases as written on the mind map. However, when asked to describe based on the Pinterest board, the participant did not refer to the written words or phrases at all but instead comfortably describes the item by just looking at the images and videos. The visual aids through the implementation of Pinterest is able to help in improving learners' motivation (Gistituati, 2019; Halim & Hashim, 2019; Baharudin et al., 2019; Zaki et al., 2017; Baharuddin & Hashim, 2020; Pazilah & Hashim, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of Pinterest in preschool ESL learning holds the potential of producing young language learners who possess critical thinking and good communication skill. The ability of acquiring these skills at a young age could ensure a smoother ESL learning journey as learners advance to the higher level of education.

The implementation of Pinterest could also produce highly motivated learners and confident speakers. These qualities are very much needed in today's world in order to ensure that learners are able to survive in real life challenging scenarios. This study believes that it is important for preschool ESL learners to be instilled with sufficient skills so that these skills will be a strong foundation for them in the future.

From this study, it is suggested for flashcards to be used during the induction phase of the class. Flashcards can still be used in the earlier stage of the lesson to give a hint of the

entire learning activity and Pinterest can be implemented during the development activity. Other than that, a few future research suggestions could also be made. This study could be expanded to see whether it could help preschool learners to enhance their writing skills, or the exact study could also be carried out to different groups of participants from a higher level of education such as the primary school learners.

All in all, educators of ESL should always think of ways to improve language learning. In this day and age, teachers should take the advantage of using technology in teaching and learning. Studies have continuously proven that technology could ease and improve ESL learning. Thus, teachers should always try to include technology in ESL classes. The world will never stop evolving hence teaching and learning should also continuously be advancing for a better ESL learning future.

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