Entrepreneurial Competencies within the Education Research Paradigm

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Abstract: *Although entrepreneurial competencies are conventionally associated with business and commerce, such concept is applicable across all disciplines. This paper revisits and discusses how the entrepreneurial competencies emerged and displayed throughout an education research study on "Exploring "Speak-O-Rama" as a Public Speaking Material". It was based on the exploratory approach in using a compilation of public speaking materials among four primary schools classes. The findings showed that the students not only displayed improvement not only in their speaking proficiency but also in their self-confidence. This paper argues that the researchers and respondents managed to inculcate and develop related elements of entrepreneurial competencies namely commitment, creativity, team work, risk taking, management skills, confidence, motivation, volunteerism and willingness to communicate in the research. Each competency was initially embedded in the works of the researchers and respondents, and analysed through content analysis by identifying the patterns that were exhibited throughout the research. This paper proposes that the concept of entrepreneurial competencies needs to be re-interpreted in a broader spectrum because they exist in any individual who acquires and displays such competencies in their professions, and in the line of education, more research on entrepreneurial competencies could be merged with other social sciences issues such as applied linguistics, communication, history and others.*

Keywords: entrepreneurial competencies, entrepreneurship education, education research

Research Area: Humanities (Education)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Most people would define entrepreneurship as the act of setting up a business venture and it is worth to note that such definition is a narrow one as stated by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) that interpreting "… an entrepreneur as a person who establishes a new organization…" is problematic. Likewise entrepreneurial competencies are commonly associated with successful entrepreneurs or business ventures, which is actually another misconception. Venkataraman (1997 in Shane and Venkataraman, 2000:218) preferred to relate entrepreneurship with the state "of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited". In other words, anyone who is able to make the most of their situation to come out with new (or adapted) ideas that are beneficial could be regarded as entrepreneurs.

In relation to entrepreneurial education, Jones and English (2004:417) stated that,

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> *Entrepreneurial education can be viewed broadly in terms of the skills that can be taught and the characteristics that can be engendered in individuals that will enable them to develop new and innovative plans*

The statement above supports the previous re-definition of entrepreneurship and as stated by Jones and English (2004) the characteristics of the entrepreneurial education are not limited to enterprises or businesses. Basically entrepreneurial education is a concept that could be integrated in any areas. Anyone can be considered as an entrepreneur as long as they have the attitudes of an entrepreneur including being creative, optimistic, and innovative and so forth.

A number of research studies suggested that entrepreneurial education is a broad concept which must not be confined to business related areas (Smith and Petersen, 2006: Kuratko, 2005; Jones and English, 2004; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000) and thus it is not accurate to assume that the education entrepreneurs are business teachers as reported by Kuratko (2005: 586) that "Entrepreneurship is now a part of the mainstream". In fact education entrepreneurs could refer to any educator (or teacher) that brings positive changes to their surroundings.

Smith and Petersen (2006) proposed the notion of social entrepreneurs as the playmakers of the respective community due to their contributions particularly in the public education area. Though the roles of an entrepreneur is exhaustive, Smith and Petersen (2006:6) listed three of them which I think are relevant to my profession as an academic namely as the; 1) change agent, 2) venue for new skill sets and mindsets, and 3) developer of learning laboratories where experimentation and ongoing learning are encouraged.

The following sections of this paper discuss the entrepreneurial competencies from the point of view of an academic researcher in addition to the three roles mentioned earlier.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

This research was initiated by the feedback from teachers regarding their students who were not confident to speak in English and that they were too shy to speak in front of the classmates. It was a difficult situation to persuade them to speak even though some of them performed well in writing English compositions. Moreover the students are studying at two private Islamic primary schools situated in Kelantan in which English is hardly a widely used language in their daily lives.

Speaking skill is one of the important language skills required to be a good communicator as the speaker has to deliver a clear and precise message to the listener/ audience. Fachrurrazy (2012) stated that speaking is a dynamic and active skill which mainly aims to convey thoughts and express ideas. In fact the first impression on the interviewee depends on how good he/she speaks or communicates with the interviewer(s) during the interview. Unfortunately teachers are more concerned on the reading and writing skills which weigh the most in the national examinations and this method is also practiced by the teachers in the context of this study. However it is unfair to blame them for such method since they have to comply with the syllabus.

As the saying goes, practice makes perfect but with less time spent on speaking skills, the students have less opportunity to practice. It is not a surprise then when most students fail to speak fluently or refuse to participate in public speaking activities. The worst case is when they continue to be reluctant speakers even when they are at the tertiary level.

In addition there are various affective factors such as confidence, motivation, language anxiety and so forth that could have an effect onstudents' language competencies. In the context of this study, as suggested by the teachers, we decided to concentrate on building students' self-confidence in public speaking. This also correlates to Brown's (2000) claim the affective domain is the emotional part in human behaviour which comprises of emotion, motivation, aptitude, anxiety and self-confidence and of all these key tenets, self-confidence is the most vital variable which affects language learning. Besides that, home, school, friends and teachers are also very important for the progression of self-confidence as they are the medium to a successful and constructive language learning process (Pierce and Gardner 2004; Tallon, 2009; Torres and Turner 2016). Considering the reality that none of the students practice their speaking skills at home, having the public speaking activities in schools is therefore the appropriate action since they can get more language support from their teachers and friends to help to increase their confidence level.

Finally, based on the initial meetings and conversations with the teachers, we decided that we needed to construct a set of public-speaking materials that could engage the students in speaking activities so that they could improve their speaking skills and gain self-confidence, which was generally the aim of this research.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND PUBLIC-SPEAKING MATERIALS

There are two research objectives, which are: 1) to inculcate students' proficiency in oral English through public speaking activities, and 2) to identify students' confidence when participating in public speaking activities.

The previous emphases on accuracy (or grammatical knowledge) and memorising dialogues are not enough for the students to succeed particularly in second or foreign language learning. Hence, the design of the materials in this study was based on the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which stated that the goal of language teaching was to improve communicative competence (Richards 2006). Via this method the students have the opportunity to use language by having meaningful and purposeful interaction with the audience (i.e. the teacher and classmates) and to move away from the traditional drilling exercises.

The name of the public speaking materials is "Speak-O-Rama" which originated from Speaking in front of '*Oghe Rama*', a direct translation from the Kelantanese dialect for 'the public or a group of people'. Basically the materials were adapted from the textbooks (so as to align the lessons with national syllabus and based on the teachers' recommendations) and online materials. In line with the CLT framework the students were encouraged to volunteer and participate in presenting a brief talk on selected themes such as My family (Week 1), My Friend (Week 2), My Classroom (Week 3) and My Ambition (Week 4). In order to attract students' attention who were primary school students to participate, we added cue cards, songs, pictures, sticky notes, and manila cards in all activities.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research implemented the exploratory approach. 6 students of one class of Year 4 from private Islamic school A and 6 from one class of school B were selected by their teacher as main respondents in this study although all the students in those 2 classes were exposed the proposed public speaking materials. There were 8 researchers involved and 4 of us were assigned to each school to carry out the public speaking lessons in which 2 of them would be the instructors whilst the other 2 would be the facilitators and participant observers.

The study examined the implementation of the Speak-O-Rama speaking activities for 4 days a week over a period of 4 continuous weeks. The students went through the speaking activities along with their respective school classmates in the classroom; however, special attention was given to the 12 respondents of the study as mentioned earlier. Each speaking activity was conducted once a week for 1 hour in the English lessons during the students' school time and each session was handled by 2 researchers as instructors and the teachers acted as non-participants observers. Upon the completion of each lesson the instructors called upon the main respondents to deliver a short guided speech in front of their teacher and classmates. Finally, after the 4th week any students, apart from the 12 main respondents, were invited to give an oral presentation in front of the teacher, other researchers and their classmates.

Data were collected through class observations and interviews with the teachers on the students' performance and the usefulness of the materials. In addition, the students were also interviewed to identify their self-confidence awareness before and after the exposure to the public speaking materials and activities.

5. *RESEARCH FINDINGS*

The findings of the research are as follows;

a) To develop students' proficiency in oral English through public speaking activities

The activities were learner-centred which complied with the framework of CLT that rejects teacher-centred approach. Instead of teacher teaching the lesson and questioning the students individually, they were involved in group activities that required them to collaborate in solving problems in language games. This activity served as the Induction set to prepare the students for the writing and consequently, the speaking activities. Later, the students started with writing simple sentences in Week 1, compound sentences in Week 2, complex sentences in Week 3, and a combination of all sentence structures in Week 4. They were guided in the initial parts of each lesson and later encouraged to adopt or adapt the cue cards given earlier for the speaking activities.

Based on the observation and teachers' feedback, the students showed some improvement in the speaking skills as they were able to use the right words to describe their family members, friends, classroom decoration and ambition (as per theme) and the length of oral texts that they delivered became longer. What impressed us was that by Week 4 most of them managed to deliver a smooth speech and they did not refer to any cue cards during the public speaking activity.

b) To identify students' confidence when participating in public speaking activities

This study found that there was significant improvement in the students' self-confidence after this module was completed. They showed a gradual change from low self-confidence in the first session to high self-confidence in the last one. These activities provided an environment of trust and the sense of competitiveness as they have to complete the tasks given within the stipulated time and being rewarded with praises by their fellow classmates, teacher and researchers. This result correlated with Pierce and Gardner's (2004), Tallon (2009) and Torres and Turner's (2016) studies that positive behaviour which in this research referred to students' successfully participated in the oral presentations as well as the encouragement from the audience were among the factors that led to effective language learning and high self-confidence.

We concluded that the students' proficiency in oral English was well-developed and they gained more self-confidence through the public speaking activities.

6. INSTILLING THE COMPETENCIES AMONG THE RESEARCHERS

"Competencies are not seen as the task of the job, but rather that which enables people to do the task" (Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2010:94). In other words, competencies include having the right mind set and attitudes to carry out the task successfully.

In the first place, none of us had any experience teaching primary school students and it was a tough and foreign experience to everyone. It was understood that as researchers we would have to perform well to accomplish our research. As we proceed with the research I came to realise that we actually embedded a lot of entrepreneurial competencies among the researchers and respondents as discussed in the following sections.

6.1 researchers

i) Commitment

The initial plan was to prepare a module for the teachers and we were non-participant observers. However after some discussions with the teachers we decided that we should teach the students as role models for the teachers (who were not trained as English teachers and none of them graduated with B.Ed degree). The whole research took place simultaneously at two different schools namely SRK (Agama) Seri Aman and SRK (Agama) AlHilal. Thus we were divided into two groups for the teaching activities for four continuous days (Monday-Thursday) for four weeks. It was a hectic and tight schedule as we also had classes at UMK at that time and there were times when we had to replace the other due to unforeseen circumstances. Finally we managed to complete our research including data collection after the fourth week and it was possible because of the full commitment from everyone in the research group.Likewise commitment is listed as one of the areas of entrepreneurial competencies apart from analytical, innovative, and personal strength competencies (Man et al., 2002 in Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2010:99). It would be hard to imagine a person to succeed if he/ she is not committed to his profession.

ii) Team work

Team work is one of the pillars of our research and as explained earlier we worked as a team in completing this research. In the first place Iman was the one who invited the others to join her research but later we started to delegate the tasks among ourselves. Thus, it was contradictory to the supervisor-supervisee relationship in which the former leads the latter throughout the whole operation by giving instructions and making sure that the supervisee is able to perform and avoid making mistakes. It is more of a common sense that in business ventures supervisor plays a major role to ensure that the business profit is not affected by the supervisee's incompetence.

However, in this context of this research everyone was of equal status since we worked side-by-side and everything was decided with everyone's consensus. We were lucky that everyone was diligent and contributed to the completion of this research. Therefore perhaps the term 'partnership' is more suitable here. It is important for all members to participate and to be accountable for his/her actions and not to blame the others if anything goes wrong.

iii) Creative

The initial plan was to compile internet materials related to public speaking and convert them into a module. After series of discussion with the teachers on the speaking activities that their students lacked of, we decided to align the activities and selection of materials with the teachers' requests and the national syllabus. As I stated earlier that none of us had any experience teaching in primary schools so it was quite difficult to imagine a ten-year-old student's preference and likes. Would they like cartoon characters or would that be very childish? Should we give them a text for memorising or just cue cards? Ward (2004:174) mentioned that, "To be successful, entrepreneurs must generate valuable ideas for new goods or services that will appeal to some identifiable market, and having identified those potential opportunities, they must figure out how to bring the project to fruition". Initially there were lots of questions and it was a struggle to be creative but in the end it was worthy. We had fun selecting, drawing and colouring the characters to be used in the speaking activities.

Technically we did not create anything totally new. What we did was to identify the appropriate speaking activities for the students' level of proficiency, modified and presented (or taught) them using interesting, relaxed and student-centred approaches. Apparently being creative helped to minimise the students' anxiety and they cooperated very well in all our activities. As a result, the number of volunteers to speak in front of the class increased from one week to another.The same principle lies with other professions as clearly stated by Ward (2004: 176) that, "Conceptual combination bears a special relationship to creativity, having been mentioned frequently in historical accounts of creative accomplishments".

iv) Risk taking

Risk taking is one of the commonly cited elements of entrepreneurial competencies. Kuratko (2005:578) looked at it beyond the perception of business activities by stating that risk taking as well as striving for opportunities and having the courage to transform ideas into reality are the combination embedded in entrepreneurs. Similarly Brown (2000 in Jones and English, 2004:417) pointed out that "there is general agreement that entrepreneurship needs to be defined more broadly than business management because it includes creativity, risk taking, and innovation".The operational definition of risk taking in this research may not be a direct monetary gain or loss as in business projects but in other forms. For example, in the first place this research is funded by the research grant from UMK and RM12000 is not a small amount of money. Secondly we spent a month carrying out the public speaking activities in those respective schools in which the time spent could have been used by the teachers to finish the syllabus. In other words both parties (the teachers and us) took a risk in ensuring the success of this research. Such research was the first in those schools and it was our first experience teaching primary school students too.

In the end we were lucky and grateful that the students showed gradual improvement in their speaking activities such as they were able to recite longer texts in front of their teacher and classmates. Moreover it was impressive to see the number of volunteers also increased tremendously by the end of this research. This could be the reason as to why the teachers asked us to expand this research from speaking skills to reading and writing skills in the future.

v) Management

Mitchelmore and Rowley (2009) cited a number of studies (Freel, 1999; Newton, 2001; Smith and Morse, 2005) on management as a part of entrepreneurial competencies and

how managerial deficiencies could lead to the failure of the business projects.Basically the statement above is also applicable in our research and it includes both the individual and group levels. On the one hand, as individuals we were responsible in managing the specific tasks assigned such as looking for teaching materials, writing the lesson plans, delivering the contents in addition to our core responsibilities; teaching at UMK and handling other academic matters. On the other hand, as groups, we have succeeded in managing our resources (including budget) and time. All the teaching activities, data collection and the publication of the first journal article were concluded within one month and we are in the process of analysing the rest of findings, writing another two journal articles and editing the public speaking materials (for the teachers' reference) before the grant ends in October 2017.

7. INSTILLING THE COMPETENCIES AMONG THE RESPONDENTS

Apart from the researchers there were some entrepreneurial competencies that emerged from the respondents (or students) which were more prominent than the others, namely being confident, motivated, volunteering, and willing to communicate.

7.1 respondents

i) Confidence

In reference to the research context, the teachers mentioned that most students, particularly the girls, were reluctant to participate in speaking activities because they feared of being ridiculed by the classmates if they stammered during the oral presentation. During the first session of the public speaking activities it was difficult to get them to participate and it was also obvious that the students lacked of confidence based on their soft voices (whilst some just mumbled), frozen posture and no eye contact with anyone.It was during the second session that the students appeared comfortable and showed interest in the speaking activities. Perhaps they realised that they should not feel embarrassed even if they made grammatical mistakes or that their speeches were impeded. This could be due to our praising their friends who participated previously despite their mediocre oral presentation. More students participated in the third and fourth sessions which suggested that there was significant improvement in the students' self-confidence.

Asoni (2011:2) proposed that, "…more self-confident people, instead, are both more likely to enter and more likely to stay in business". Such statement indicated that people who are more confident would grab the chance to join and survive better in the business ventures. As mentioned much earlier in this writing that entrepreneurial competencies are now universal concepts, being confident is applicable in the students' situation as well. Besides, the findings of this research showed that when the students started to gradually develop their self-confidence they were inclined to participate in the following public speaking sessions. The limitation of this research was time constraint and if it were a longitudinal study we could have proven that highly self-confident students would make good public speakers.

ii) Motivation

"Confidence in one's abilities generally enhances motivation" (Bénabou and Tirole, 2002:871). The relationship between confidence and motivation is reciprocal in which one supports the other and I have explained at lengthy in the section above on how the students' confidence improved and they began to take part in the public speaking sessions. Such acts could be interpreted that confidence could be the internal tool that motivated the students to move forward. Relevant to this study, the public speaking introduced throughout the intervention has promoted the students' level of extrinsic motivation through the teaching techniques adopted as well as the rewards given in the form of compliments and materials

which has consequently improved their oral proficiency as well as their confidence and motivation levels.It is true that, "Self-confidence is valuable because it improves the individual's motivation to undertake projects and persevere in the pursuit of his goals, in spite of the setbacks and temptations that periodically test his willpower" (Bénabou and Tirole, 2002:877). Thus similar to confidence, being motivated is an entrepreneurial competency that could be applied across all disciplines and not limited to business events.

iii) Volunteerism

The act of volunteering is quite an unpopular concept in our society and to expect the students to volunteer for the public speaking was like an impossible task, according to the teachers. Volunteerism is not often mentioned as entrepreneurship- related term but I would argue that it should be considered as an entrepreneurial competency particularly if we were to relate it to social entrepreneurship. The concept of volunteering is the same although in social entrepreneurship, it is "embedded in economic discourse and developed in the market economy" (Anderson, 2015:49) since to volunteer means to freely offer oneself to undertake a task. It can be concluded from the findings of this research that the students became more confident and motivated and as a result they volunteered for the public speaking sessions. The students kept raising their hands to be called upon and they took turn to deliver the short speech immediately one after another. In fact the teachers were shocked when the number of volunteers doubled in the final session, which was a pleasant surprise.

iv) Willingness to communicate

I argue that willingness to communicate should be considered as an entrepreneurial competence since one should encompass such attitude in order to establish a good relationship with the others. It does not make any sense if a recluse is able to succeed in life without communicating with others. According to MacIntyre, (2007:2), "When presented with an opportunity to use their second language (L2), some people choose to speak up and others choose to remain silent" and in our context, more students prefer to keep quiet which is the same case with volunteering. Fortunately being confident and motivated appeared to influent the students to volunteer (in the second, third and final public speaking sessions), including their willingness to communicate.Their speeches were more comprehensible with some gestures to convey their speech content and they were able to communicate well with the researchers during the presentations.

8. SMITH AND PETERSEN'S (2006:6) ROLES OF AN ENTREPRENEUR REVISITED

1) Change agent,
   - We were able to function as the change agent to the students in which the students showed improvement in their oral proficiency through the public speaking sessions. In addition some students transformed from being passive learners to active, confident and motivated learners which could be seen from their enthusiastic response during the sessions.
2) Venue for new skill sets and mind sets,
   - We were able to provide the suitable platform for the teachers and students to polish their oral proficiency and practice their speaking skills. It does not have to be a formal setting because they can start the activities in the classroom before moving to public audience such as on the stage during the morning school assembly.
3) Developer of learning laboratories where experimentation and ongoing learning are encouraged.

- We were able to show the teachers that they can be developer of learning laboratories with the appropriate teaching methods and relevant materials. For instance they should not be afraid to try out new teaching methods as long as the students are able to see that they are learning what they are supposed to learn, and not just for the sake of passing the examination.

9. CONCLUSION

On the one hand, this research has shown the effectiveness of using the Speak-O-Rama speaking activities to increase students' oral proficiency along with employing self-confidence to speak in public at a young age. Hyland (1991: para.29) stated that "Public speaking is a skill that improves with practice and students need plenty of opportunities to perfect it". Indeed, students involved in this study gained much enhancement. The students showed high level of confidence and motivation upon completion of the four-week public speaking activities where they dedicated good participation; in fact, the number of students volunteering to speak in front increased from week to week. Therefore I could claim that the activities were effective as they greatly contributed towards the speaking skills of the students. It is hoped that this study will help teachers to have a better understanding in selecting and choosing materials, and the process involved in preparing effective instructional materials, particularly focusing on speaking skills.

On the other hand, as mentioned by Mitchelmore and Rowley (2010:97) that, "Entrepreneurial competencies have also been understood in terms of traits, skills and knowledge and there has been interest in how these skills are applied in different contexts". Hence, recalling the stages and processes that my colleagues and I have gone through made me aware that we had the attributes of entrepreneurial competenciesduring the research. We focussed on the speaking skills which involved oral presentations skills, and on the parts of the researchers, we have shown commitment, creativity, team work, risk taking and management skills. Furthermore the respondents of our research also displayed the entrepreneurial competencies in terms of being confident, motivated, volunteering and willingness to communicate.

In conclusion, the concept of entrepreneurial competencies needs to be re-interpreted in a broader spectrum because they exist in any individual who acquires and displays such competencies in their profession.

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