

# ***The Application of Communicative Language Teaching Approach Through Communicative Activities to Increase Students' Ability in Speaking Class in 5th Graders of ABC Elementary School Surabaya***

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## ***ABSTRACT***

This research is an action research which was applied to the online class mode due to pandemic Covid-19. This article explains on how to apply the Communicative Language Teaching Approach through communicative activities to increase students' ability in speaking class in 5th graders of ABC Elementary School Surabaya. The subject of the study is the students of 5<sup>th</sup> graders of ABC Elementary School Surabaya. This research used a spiral model introduced by Kemmis et al., which was carried out in 2 cycles. Data was collected from the students' questionnaire, the students' engagement checklist, interview and speaking rubric. A preliminary data was taken before the first cycle. This research was considered successful if the number of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in ABC Elementary School Surabaya who got KKM (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal*) score 75 and above in their speaking test is minimum 15 students out of 30 students.

In the end of the first cycle it was found out that students who got 75 and above were 16 students. that meant the indicator of success was achieved. However, the second cycle was carried out to increase the number of students who got 75 and above.

The final result in the second cycle was 29 students out of 30 got 75 and above. A conclusion could be drawn from the final result, that the indicator of success had been accomplished. It showed that communicative activities can increase students' speaking ability.

***Key Words:*** Communicative Language Teaching, Communicative Activities, Speaking Ability.

## Introduction

Learning a language cannot be separated from learning how to communicate well in the target language. To be able to communicate well, students need intensive practice so the communication which takes place in real situation is nicely overcome within such a short time to think up the responses. For countries with English as Foreign Language (EFL) speaking skill is not taught with the same portion as the other three skills: reading, writing and listening. It is due to reasons such as grammatically correct sentences are easier to create rather than grammatically correct utterances. However, speaking skill is more than just studying the grammar and sentence structure. It needs the knowledge of spoken terms which are not learned when studying how to form a sentence.

It is really a challenge for teachers to teach speaking skill in classes with less motivated students to get involved with. The question is what is the best way for teachers to make the students involved actively without compulsion and make them feel free to express their ideas in the target language in the way we would like them to.

The parents' role and support also determine the students' learning motivation. Due to the fact that most of the students' parents in ABC school have low contribution on the running of their children's education, more or less affects the students' attitude of learning, including the learning of the English language. The students do not seem to pay much attention to their mastery of the English language. All they want is just good

scores on their school reports rather than the necessity of long-term proficiency. This behavior causes indifference specifically in learning speaking skill.

This situation is strengthened by the fact that the teaching of English in Indonesia is as foreign language. Our students do not get the teaching of speaking skill proportionally. They understand English but that does not mean they can speak English in normal fluency. In ABC School, English language is taught mostly separated from the speaking activity. In addition, the students in speaking class are less involved and less active because first, the students are afraid of making grammatical/vocabulary/pronunciation mistakes in using spoken English. These fears prevent them from producing utterances. In connection with this, as the second fact, the students tend to use mother tongue all the time when they communicate with their peers, especially in the speaking class, where they are most expected to use the target language as communication. Third, the teaching method and approach did not match with the students' needs. In preliminary data which was taken roughly, it was found out that only at the maximum of ten out of thirty students were observed active and involved in the speaking activity. As an added value, it will be a good marketing attempt for the school when the students' English language learning is clearly seen in their speaking skill.

Based on the above-mentioned reasons, the English language teachers are all in great responsibility to make sure the students are in good fluency of spoken English. Thus,

since early grades, students in ABC school learned English with the most meeting hours (six hours in a week). Compared to other subjects, Mathematics for example, English has double portion. The practice of speaking skill in ABC School has been attempted since early learning (since grade one). However, speaking skill seems to lose its way out of the other three skills, reading, writing and listening, because of the curriculum demand and those skills are more easily graded since the tests are written tests. In speaking class, most students are speechless and do not know what to say although the teacher has given examples of the grammar patterns, favorite topics and some advice such as not to hesitate to speak up, not to be afraid to make mistakes and so on. Few students who are involved actively seem to monopolize the class and the teacher's attention. As a result, the class ended up with most of the students left unheard. When it comes to speaking test, so far teachers always prepare some texts students have to memorize and retell during the test without fail. Teachers use to tell the students what to say rather than speak up their own mind based on what they have learned.

The similar problems have occurred in college and schools. One research was held by Dewi (2016) whose thesis was entitled "Improving Student's Speaking Skill Through Communicative English for Specific Purposes" This approach was successful when it was applied to the college students of *Universitas Tujuh Belas Agustus Semarang*. Maryam's action research (2020) was also successful by implementing the

communicative language games. In her thesis entitled "Utilizing Communicative Language Games to Improve Students' Speaking Ability" she concluded that the using of communicative language games proved to be effective and can improve student's speaking ability.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014) Communicative Language Teaching Approach emphasizes the process of communication. It is a student-centered classroom management rather than a teacher-centered one. The teachers' role is to monitor and facilitate all activities in the class including self-correction assistance to the students. Furthermore, Harmer (2007) said that Communicative Language Teaching means different things to different people, in which activities put the students in real communication. Real communication includes inviting, apologizing, agreeing/disagreeing, problem solving, sharing information, poem or story composing, which results in the use of communicative activities in speaking class. In short, Communicative Language Teaching which is translated into communicative activities, means a student-centered foreign language speaking class where the teacher monitors and facilitates the real communication the students are having.

The purpose of this study is to know the application of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach through communicative activities in increasing students' ability in speaking class in 5th graders of ABC Elementary School Surabaya.

## Literature Review

### Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is an approach in language learning in terms of its communicative function which involves students in realistic communication, in their need to express meaning, to interact and to use language for different purposes and functions.

Concerning the need to communicate, students have greater roles than the teachers. Students are to work together to create cooperative learning in speaking and expected to rely less on their teacher for error correction. Listening to their peers is compulsory, thus they should be made comfortable with each other before the activities begin. Either in groups or pairs, students are responsible for their own need to learn (Richards and Rodgers (2014)). In this way, students will understand when the communication fails, it is a responsibility borne by both speakers and listeners. In reverse, successful communication is also determined by the effort of both parties' contribution in speaking.

In the CLT classroom, teachers and students change their roles. Students do not rely on the teacher for correction in their utterances. It is not a prime responsibility for teachers to make sure that her students are producing error free speech. Teacher has to make the students aware of their errors in different views during the learning process (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

The main objective of CLT is the

communicative competence which the students have to gain by the end of the learning process (Richards, 2006). It is the ability to use the target language for communication in real context. In order to gain communicative competence, students need to be able to apply the language functions in many different contexts. Context here means people they are talking to, time and location where the communication happens. It is also a competence of how to maintain good communication and make sure that the communication runs successfully.

### Communicative Activities

Communicative activities are sets of classroom activities that are designed to encourage students to use the target language actively and communicatively in order to equip them with spoken skill in real communication.

Littlewood in Sedya M (2013) divided communicative activities into two main categories:

1. Functional communicative activities. This activity is to get students to use the target language in a way that they are familiar with meaningful communication. Success is measured according to the ability of the students to handle the communicative demands of the immediate situation.
2. Social interaction activities. This is another important aspect that teachers should take

into account when teaching speaking. The students have to regard social context for their interaction with others. Teachers need to prepare various kinds of social context which is a necessary requirement before getting the students involved in communication performance outside the classroom. Nevertheless, the classroom is the best place to start practicing social context for language use. Therefore, the teaching of speaking must include communicative activities in which the students can be introduced to social context even in the early age of language study.

## Speaking Ability

### The Nature of Speaking

Being able to speak is totally different from being able to understand grammar and vocabulary. Chaney and Burk in AL-Garni and Almuhammadi (2019, p. 73) defined speaking “*as the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, in a variety of contexts and it is regarded as an essential skill in learning and teaching English as a foreign language*”.

Harmer (2001) proposed four language features in speaking, those are:

1. Connected speech. In learning spoken language, speakers need to be able to produce individual phonemes (e.g. as when saying *I would have known*) as well as to apply fluent connected speech (e.g. as in *I'd've known*).
2. Expressive devices. In order to be fully effective communicators, English language students should be able to apply variation of volume and speed, change the pitch and stress of certain utterances, and show how they feel in face-to-face interactions.
3. Lexis and grammar. Spontaneous speech is labeled by sets of common lexical and grammatical phrases. Therefore, it is compulsory for teachers to provide various phrases for different language function such as agreeing/disagreeing, expressing like/dislike, surprise or shock.
4. Negotiation language. This is a language of bargaining or asking for clarification. So before let the students connected socially, the teacher needs to provide series of phrases as follows:
  - a. *I'm sorry, I don't understand*
  - b. *Could you repeat that again, please? May I play in the park?*
  - c. *What about going to the cinema?*

In conclusion, naturally speaking as the means of communication is a skill that needs a mastery of verbal and nonverbal symbols, connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar and negotiation ability in order to communicate freely and effectively.

Speaking is one ability that a language student has to acquire in order to communicate in the target language. According to Nunan in Charina (2013), there are two main aspects that the speaker has to consider to have a successful communication, those are accuracy and fluency. Accuracy means the ability to combine the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary accurately in good pronunciation. Fluency means the ability to get involved and at the same time maintain continuity in spontaneous conversation.

### **The Speaking Assessment**

One of the important aspects in language teaching is the assessment. Brown (2003) said that whenever a student makes a comment or gives a response to a question, it means a chance for the teacher to assess the student's performance. Furthermore, assessment is useful to see whether the goals of learning have been achieved or not. According to Thornburry (2006) speaking test, either formal or informal one, must be carried out at the beginning and at the end of most language classes.

In order for learning of speaking to be effective, it is suggested that speaking is equipped with speaking tasks. Speaking tasks are useful for students to practice their speaking skill. Brown (2003) stated

that there are five speaking performance assessment tasks:

#### **1) Imitative Speaking**

The first stage of speaking performance is simply imitating a word, phrase or sentence. Imitative speaking is focusing on pronunciation. Students are not expected to understand meaning or to participate in a conversation. Students need to listen carefully to the language produced that must be imitated.

#### **2) Intensive Speaking**

This task is connected with the production of short verbal language to refer competence in a small group of grammatical, phrasal or phonological relationships. Students must be aware of semantic properties in order to be able to respond. Intensive assessment tasks cover directed response tasks, reading aloud and sentence and dialogue completion.

#### **3) Responsive Speaking**

This includes interaction and comprehension in brief conversations, standard greetings, small talks, simple requests, comments and identical utterances.

#### **4) Interactive Speaking**

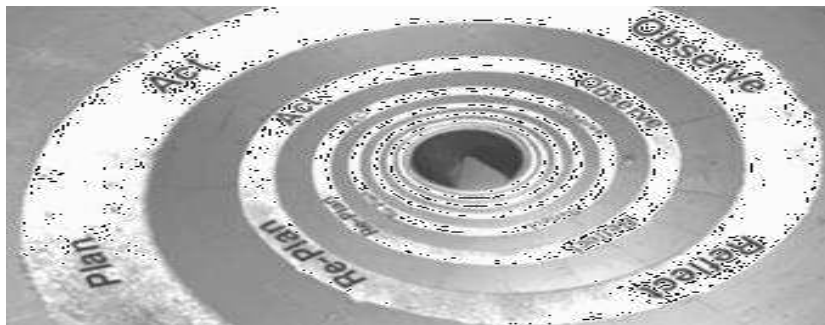
What differentiates responsive to interactive speaking is the length and difficulty of interaction involving various exchanges and or participants. The tasks are in the form of interactive discourse such as interviews, role plays, discussions, games, and long duration tasks with less interaction like speeches, telling longer stories, and extended explanations and translations.

## 5) Extensive speaking

It includes speeches, presentations and story-telling. The language style is often more deliberative and formal. Nevertheless, learners often produce informal monologues in the form of casually delivered speech, such as my vacation in the mountain, a pasta recipe or recounting the plot of a film or movie.

## Research Method

This action research takes the spiral model introduced by Kemmis et al. (2014). There are four steps in each cycle: *plan, act, observe* and *reflect*. After carrying out the first cycle, the result of the previous reflection can be used to determine the next plan in the second cycle. The process will stop when the desired results have been achieved. Picture 1 is the illustration of the process.



Picture 1 Spiral Model Source: Kemmis et al. (2014)

The research was carried out from July 2021 until November 2021 during or after school hour. The subject of the research was the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students of ABC school in C class.

Indicator of success is determined as follows: The number of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in ABC Elementary School Surabaya who got 75 and above in their speaking test is minimum 15 students out of 30 students.

There were 4 instruments for data collection:

1. The Student Engagement Checklist. It was to observe the involve-

ment of the students in the speaking class. This instrument consists of three aspects:

- a. Positive body language
- b. Participation
- c. Confidence

The criteria of the numbers the students would obtain were as follows:

- 4 = always
- 3 = often
- 2 = sometimes
- 1 = never

the data would be counted using the following formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of correct answers}}{40} \times 100$$

Notes:

20 - 40 - poor

41 - 60 - fair

61 - 80 - good

81 - 100 – excellent

2. The Student Questionnaire. This instrument was used to discover the students' interest in the English language. It was delivered for obtaining the preliminary data and at the end of the learning process to find out the increasing interest, which would influence the students' involvement in the speaking class. It would be shared via google form and after it was explained briefly to the students. Students are given 2 (two) days to complete the questionnaire. The variables were:

I join the speaking activity in class I speak English with my friends

I listen to the teacher and my friends talking I speak English in group work

I share ideas with my friends and teacher

The range of the answers was from 1 until 5, defined as follows:

1 = never

2 = seldom

3 = sometimes

4 = frequently

5 = always

3. The Interview. This instrument is used to check on the students' opinion about the speaking learning process and how they felt about it. Once they like English and feel confident with the language it means they would get involved easily during the speaking activity. The Interview would be carried out after the teaching and learning process, via zoom meeting. The students would be called one by one in a break room. The data of the interview is used only to confirm the Student Questionnaire to avoid any misunderstanding due to shyness or uncomfortable feeling during either the filling out of the questionnaire or the interview.

4. The Speaking Rubric. It was used to check on the students' speaking ability before (as the pretest) and after (as the posttest) each cycle to know whether there was improvement on the students' speaking ability or not. There were 2 (two) aspects included: accuracy and fluency.

the data was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Final score} = \frac{\text{student score}}{10} \times 100$$

The result could be categorized as follows:

20 - 40 - poor

41 - 60 - fair

61 - 80 - good

81 - 100 - excellent

## Result and Discussion The Pre-Cycle

There were 13 girls and 17 boys in the class at the age of 10-11 years old in average, 30 students in total. The first data taken was the Student Engagement Checklist. Because the researcher herself had to handle the speaking activity in the class, the teaching and learning process was recorded for previewing after class. The recordings and anecdotal notes were taken 3 times on August 3, 2021; August 10, 2021 and August 17, 2021.

There were 4 students in poor condition concerning their activeness and engagement

in the speaking class. Mostly, students in poor or fair conditions closed their zoom camera during the speaking activity. Only students in excellent conditions were willing to join the activity and giving response to the teacher's questions or instructions. When they were asked why they closed their camera during learning, some of them admitted that they were afraid to speak English because they did not know the correct grammar as well as the vocabulary. Some also replied they did not know how to speak English and according to them English is difficult.

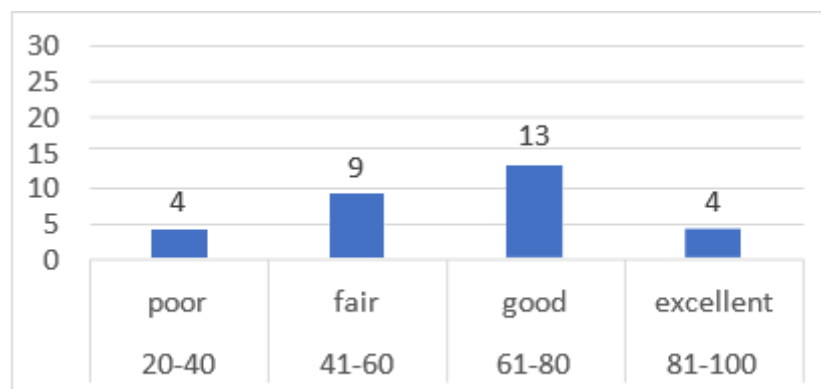


Figure 1 – Chart of Student Engagement Checklist in the Pre-Cycle

From the collected data of the speaking rubric, the result showed that many students failed in the speaking test. Only 5 students or around 16,7% got 75, the score determined by the indicator. Some students were afraid to make mistakes when they spoke English. That was what made them avoid using English even in the English class. When they were asked about their opinion of some problems almost half of the students could not say anything because they did not know how to give their opinion. There were

11 students with very little or even no sound of communication and very little or no English words produced. The rest showed ability ranged from poor to adequate but not rich vocabulary and many mistakes in grammar. However 5 students managed an effective communication in short conversation although they had poor vocabulary, they were still understandable enough.

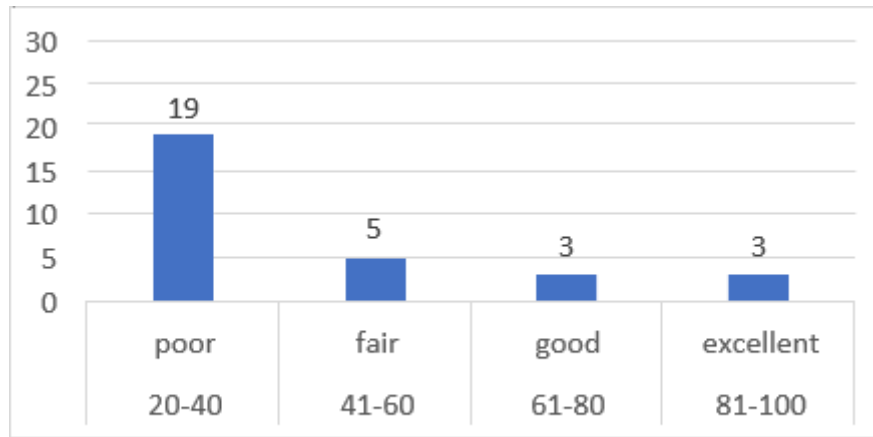


Figure 2 – Chart of Speaking Rubric in the Pre-Cycle

### The First Cycle

The first cycle of the action research was carried out from September 2021 until October 2021. The lesson plan was designed for 6 meeting sessions. The first meeting session was for explaining all the vocabularies needed for the speaking activity. The second until the fourth meeting session was for the speaking activities. During the teaching and learning, the researcher took a close attention to students with poor to fair speaking ability by giving them as many chances to speak as possible to increase their scores at the end of the first cycle.

The communicative activities held in the speaking class were:

1. Question and Answer  
Some certain conditions were delivered to the students and they would answer the questions, then they repeated the same activity among their peers.
2. Expressing personal opinions  
Once the teacher launched the topic, students were asked about their personal opinion concerning

it.

3. Showing agreement or disagreement  
After one student gave his/her opinion, the other students could express his/her agreement/disagreement.
4. Asking for clarification  
When one student said a certain term concerning the topic which the other student did not understand, he/she could ask for clarification about that certain term.

From the first cycle, the collected data were as follows:

The first observation was on the students' engagement using the Student Engagement Checklist. There was an increasing activeness during the first cycle. Students in poor condition were decreased from 4 to 2, fair condition from 9 to 8, and good from 13 to 12. On the contrary, the excellent ones doubled from 4 to 8.

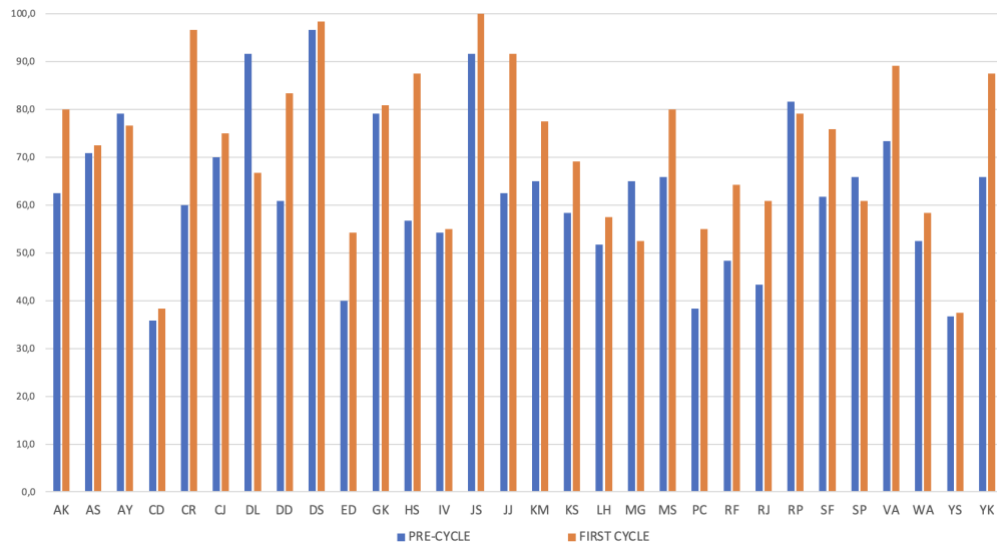


Figure 3 – Comparison of The Student Engagement Checklist Log Chart Between Pre and First Cycle

The speaking rubric showed there was a significantly increasing scores on the speaking ability. There were 16 students had got 75. The other 9 students had not succeeded yet, however that did not mean they made no progress. In fact, they made good progress although they did not get 75. There were 5 students did not make any progress but their scores had already reached 75.

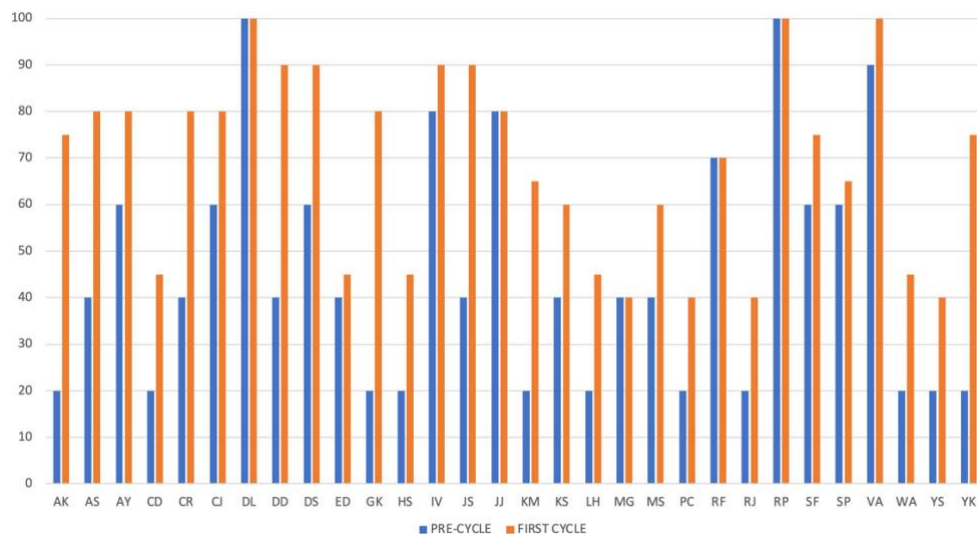


Figure 4 – The Comparison of The Speaking Rubric Log Chart Between Pre and First Cycle

The number of students who have reached 75 increased from 5 to 16, which was already over the research indicator requirement, that was 15 students.

Generally, most students made good progress. That could be seen from the increasing scores of the speaking test in the end of the First Cycle. However, there were still 14 students who had not reached 75 yet. However, in spite of the fact that most of the students were making progress and the scores of the engagement and the rubric were increased significantly, second cycle still needed to be carried out due to some following reasons:

1. There were students whose status in the Student Engagement Checklist were poor or fair needed to be stimulated more to increase their activeness in the speaking class.
2. There were 14 students who did not reach 75. By the end of the second cycle, it was expected that all students reached 75 in their scores. As an attempt to increase the speaking ability, a discussion forum on online games would be held. In this case, the students would be asked about their most favorite online games and explain how it worked. In the second cycle the material was made to be more difficult than that of the first cycle.

## **The Second Cycle**

This time the lesson was designed for 4 meeting sessions. The first meeting session was for explaining the vocabularies for the speaking activity. The second until the fourth meeting session was for the speaking activities. The class began with the sharing of the vocabularies connected to how to give simple explanation on their favourite online games. The most suitable activity was questions and answers among friends. A close attention was drawn especially to students with poor to fair speaking ability by assisting them to deliver some utterances to explain about their favourite games. By the end of the lesson, students were expected to be able to clarify the features in their favourite games, give simple explanations on how to play and finish the games. During the whilst activity, it would be possible that it became an open discussion because one or two certain games were the most favourite.

The first observation was on the students' engagement using the Student Engagement Checklist. When the vocabulary of "how to" was shared during the first meeting, the students seemed to be more interested than before. That was because they were allowed to open their game features and try to give simple explanation following the given example. It was noted there was an increasing activeness during the second cycle. Students in poor condition were decreased from 2 to 0, fair condition from 8 to 6. On the contrary, good ones increased from 12 to 13, and the excellent ones from 8 to 11.

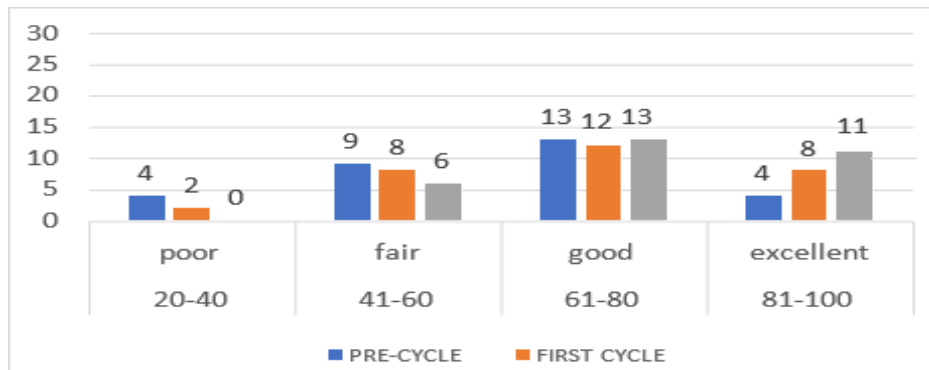


Figure 5 – Comparison of The Student Engagement Checklist Log Chart Between Pre, First and Second Cycle

As for the speaking ability, which was increased significantly, it was affected more or less by the topic of discussion. Prior to the activities, it must be found out what the students' interests were. Afterwards, the activities were selected to be the most matched ones to the topics. This is also connected to the Communicative Language Teaching theory in Richard and Rodgers (2014) which emphasizes the process of communication. It was supported by Harmer (2007) who said that the activities put the students in

real communication. In this context, the carefully selected topics for the communicative activities showed good result on the students, not only on their activeness and engagement but also their speaking ability. By the end of the Second Cycle, almost all students had reached 75 I their speaking scores. There was only one student who couldn't reach 75. The clear picture of their enhancement in speaking ability is shown in the following chart.

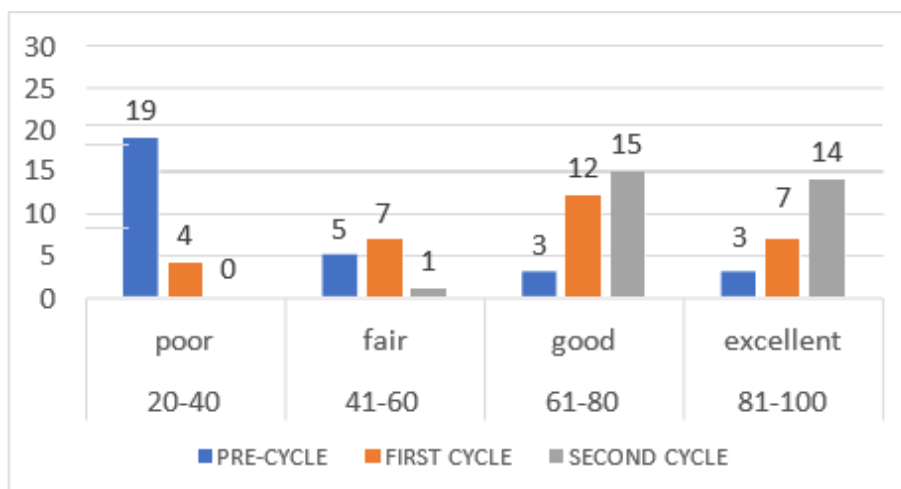


Figure 17 – The Comparison of The Speaking Rubric Log Chart Between Pre, First and Second Cycle

As the reflection, it could be concluded that:

1. Online class makes a totally different class activities, especially in speaking class. Offline class provides more various peer activities such as finding hidden word cards, sentence matching, exchanging word cards and so on.
2. In online class the students are slow to respond to conversation. There are many reasons for them to do so, such as the internet connection, problems in household, the supporting gadgets, etc.

Hopefully in the next action research which may be done online, the researcher should consider how to adjust the activities that were most suitable to the students.

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

Based on the data analysis and the interpretation of the findings of this action research, the researcher would like to conclude that communicative activities helped improve students' speaking ability. As an additional result, communicative activities also helped the students to be more engaged in the speaking class. The indicator of success, which is determined as follows: *The number of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in ABC Elementary School Surabaya who got 75 and above in their speaking test is at least 15 students out of 30 students*, had been reached as well. In fact, by the end of the research, number of students who got 75 and above were 29 out of 30 students.

In accordance with the end result of this action research, here are some practical suggestions for the following parties:

#### 1. To the School

The school must support the teachers by having intensive cooperation with the students' parents. It cannot be denied that parents' role is crucial in online classes. For that reason, school acts as a partner for both teachers and parents to provide a good teaching and learning atmosphere.

#### 2. To the School Leader

The school leader should maintain the teachers' good performance in their classroom teaching. This can be done by applying the communicative activities especially in the speaking class.

#### 3. To the English Teachers

English teachers should do a sufficient preparation in online classes, especially the speaking class, as it was mentioned above that online speaking class for older elementary students was not an easy class to handle. The preparation might include the approach, the online learning application, the media (such as game features, etc) and the material. If needed, teachers might arrange a special lesson plan for speaking class outside the set ones.

Regarding the topics of discussion, teachers should make sure that the students really like the topics. It is better if those are the trending topics evolved among kids. It will be much

better if teachers find out what the students' most interests are.

#### 4. To the Students

The students might inform the teachers what topics they are interested in for the speaking class. It is necessary for teachers to have some inputs concerning students' interest to help arrange the suitable lesson plan.

#### 5. To the Researcher

For the next online speaking class, the researcher might need to give more time for students to exchange opinions on the topics they like. So additional time outside the class is most suggested to accommodate students' eagerness on certain topics.

#### 6. For the next research

For the next research on speaking class, it is recommended that the researcher do the following: Either it is an online or offline class, consider to give the students more room to do some chatting with their peers without the interference of the teacher. As long as it is about the topic of discussion and they use English to communicate, the teacher should let them enjoy one another's company. The teacher's role in speaking class is only as an activity director and supporter. Regarding grammar mistakes, the teacher should take notes and may discuss it later after the discussion is over.

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