

# USING TALKING CHIPS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN EFL CLASSROOM

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**Abstract:** This classroom action research is aimed at identifying whether the use of Talking Chips improves student's participation in English class, and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of Talking Chips when it is implemented. The research was conducted in a cycle at the tenth grade of a senior high school in Surakarta, Central Java, from February through June 2013. The data were collected through observation, questionnaire, field notes, photographs and interview. The data were analyzed using constant comparative method. The research findings show that the implementation of Talking Chips improves the students' participation in English class. The improvement includes: 1) Students were active and brave to speak aloud and most of them answered questions voluntarily, 2) Most of the students asked the teacher confidently and they even gave comment to their classmates' answer, 3) Some students were able to answer teacher's questions spontaneously, 4) Students enjoyed working in a group and gave contribution to the discussion, 5) Most of the students looked confident when speaking English in front of the class although they need a long preparation, and 6) Students were more focused on the task and classroom activity.

**Keywords:** Talking Chips, students' participation, EFL classroom

## INTRODUCTION

Students' active participation in classroom plays an important role in the success of language learning (Tatar, 2005). Jackson (2002) also proposes that participation provides the setting where students can construct and shape their identities as members of classroom. Moreover, research has shown that participation in classroom activities is important for effective learning to take place (Tsui, 1996). Through active engagement in classroom, students learn to think critically and enhance their intellectual development. By doing that, students are making what they learn as part of themselves (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

Active participation of the students in EFL classroom can be identified from five indicators (Mustapha and Abd Rahman, 2001). They are (1) Natural desire to participate. Students are willing to voluntarily ask and answer questions, sharing opinion or ideas to others during classroom or group discussion. (2) Showing confidence. Students seem comfortable when speaking and maintain eye-contact to the teacher or other classmates. (3) Enjoy participating in classroom discussion. Students exhibit joy and ease in carrying out activities in class, they always have something to contribute to group discussion by sharing ideas, asking questions or making plans. (4) Spontaneity. Students do not take long time to think and fluent in answering

questions or sharing ideas to the class. (5) Exhibiting focus and consistency. Students are never distracted and stay on the task or class activity, and they show consistency in contributing to the class activity or discussion in every meeting.

However, it is not easy to encourage EFL students to participate actively in learning process. Tsui's study identifies that getting the students to be involved and orally participate in EFL classroom is one of the teachers' major problems (Tsui, 1995: 82). As claimed by Yule (2006) that for most EFL students, the experience with the L2 is fundamentally different from their L1 experience, and the classroom atmosphere is hardly conducive for language acquisition. Such condition happens in most of students in Indonesia. They feel that English is very difficult because they achieve English only in formal school as foreign language and are unfamiliar to their daily life.

In the pre-research, I encountered several problems in the tenth grade classroom of SMA N 5 Surakarta. Those problems are: 1) Students did not voluntarily answer questions in English; 2) Students did not voluntarily ask questions or give opinion, suggestion and comment; 3) When students were asked by the teacher, the respond was not spontaneous; 4) Students showed no enthusiasm in both classroom and group discussion; 5) Students looked unconfident when speaking English in the classroom; 6) Few students could not focus on the task or activity in the classroom.

Considering the problems above, I improved the students' participation using Talking Chips. Talking Chips is a cooperative learning technique which was developed by Spencer Kagan in 1992. In talking chips, students participate in a group discussion by giving a token when they speak. The purpose of this technique is to ensure equitable participation by regulating

how often each group member is allowed to speak. Because it emphasizes full and even participation from all members of the group, this technique encourages passive students to speak out and talkers to reflect. Talking chips is useful for helping students to discuss controversial issues, and it is useful to solve communicating or process problem such as dominating group discussion.

The technique helps students to build listening and communication skills (Millis and Cottell in Barkley, 2005). Students who tend to "spout off" consider more carefully what they have to say since it will require their surrendering a token; passive students feel encouraged to speak because the ground rules have created an environment that promotes participants by all. According to Kagan (2009) in Cooperative Learning, Talking Chips has some advantages, they are: 1) Talking chips increases students' achievement, 2) It can be used to build interaction among the students and create mutual understanding among the group members, 3) Students learn to work with and understand other group members by working in group, 4) Talking chips increase students' skill of higher level of thinking.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research includes pre-research, action, and activities after the research, conducted in a cycle at class X-5 of SMA N 5 Surakarta in the academic year of 2012/2013, from February through June 2013. There are 30 students in class X-5 consisting of 21 girls and 9 boys. The data were collected through observation, questionnaire, field notes, photographs, and interview. The data were analyzed using constant comparative method. In observing the students' behavior, I was assisted by two observers (FF and HK).

Table 1. Scoring Rubric of Participation

Indicators	Criteria				Score
	4	3	2	1	
<b>Natural desire to participate</b>	Student <b>always</b> voluntarily asks and answers questions, and shares opinion or ideas	Student <b>usually</b> voluntarily asks and answers questions, and shares opinion or ideas	Student <b>rarely</b> voluntarily asks and answers questions, and shares opinion or ideas	Student <b>never</b> voluntarily asks and answers questions, and shares opinion or ideas	
<b>Showing confidence</b>	Student <b>always</b> seems comfortable and maintains eye-contact to the teacher or other classmates when speaking	Student <b>occasionally</b> seems comfortable and maintains eye-contact to the teacher or other classmates when speaking	Student <b>rarely</b> seems comfortable and maintains eye-contact to the teacher or other classmates when speaking	Student <b>never</b> seems comfortable and maintains eye-contact to the teacher or other classmates when speaking	
<b>Enjoy contributing to class discussion</b>	Student <b>always</b> exhibit joy and ease in carrying out activities and doing task in groups	Student <b>occasionally</b> exhibit joy and ease in carrying out activities and doing task in groups	Student <b>rarely</b> exhibit joy and ease in carrying out activities and doing task in groups	Student <b>never</b> exhibit joy and ease in carrying out activities and doing task in groups	
<b>Spontaneity</b>	Student <b>almost never</b> takes long time to think and fluently answers questions and shares his ideas.	Student <b>rarely</b> takes long time to think and fluently answers questions and shares his ideas.	Student <b>usually</b> takes long time to think and fluently answers questions and shares his ideas.	Student <b>almost always</b> takes long time to think and fluently answers questions and shares his ideas.	
<b>Exhibit focus</b>	Student is <b>never</b> distracted and stays on the task or class activity <b>all of the time.</b>	Student is <b>occasionally</b> distracted and stays on the task or class activity <b>most of the time.</b>	Student is <b>rarely</b> distracted and stays on the task or class activity <b>some of the time.</b>	Student is <b>always</b> distracted and <b>hardly ever</b> stays on the task or class activity	
<b>Total Score</b>					

The students' participation was scored using scoring rubric of participation. It can be seen in Table 1. From the table above, it can be seen that the students' participation was scored based on their consistency. The maximum score is 4 and the minimum is 1. I used checklist to observe participation of each student in every meeting.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The use of Talking Chips helped the students to improve their participation in English class. It is proved by the improvement of students' mean score in pre-observation and post-observation. It can be shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Mean Score of Participation

Observation	Mean Score	Percentage
Pre-observation	11.7	58.5%
Post-observation	15.9	79.6%
Improvement	4.2	21%

The students' improvement of participation in English class can be seen from the mean score of post-observation which was higher than the mean score of pre-observation. The mean score of pre-

observation was 11.7 while the mean score of post-observation was 15.9 (the maximum score is 20). The description about the students' score improvement of each indicator is shown in Table 3.

*Table 3. Students' Improvement of each Indicator*

	Natural Participation	Confidence	Enjoying Discussion	Spontaneity	Focus
Pre-observation	2.2	2.5	2.7	1.5	2.7
Post-observation	3.3	3.5	3.6	2.1	3.3
Improvement	27.5%	25%	22.5%	15%	15%

Beside the scores above, I also observed the students' behavior when Talking Chips was implemented in English class. The observation was carried out in five meetings by the assistance of two collaborators (FF and HK), which is summarized as follows.

In the first meeting, students utilized their listening and reading skills. Before listening activity, I tried to encourage students to speak English by asking them about their funny experience. She asked them to share their funny experience to the class using their tokens, yet some students were kept silent while the other enthusiastically told their story. Male students sitting in the back row did not even pay attention. They were busy talking about something out of the topic and one of them was more interested in his laptop instead.

When students were asked to check their answer with the class, they always answered the questions at the same time and the class became very noisy. I then asked them to use their tokens and answer one by one. Most of them looked hesitate and spoke softly when answering questions.

In the second meeting, the students' participation was scored during the group discussion and performance (assisted by the observers). During the lesson, student MAP

did not fully focus on the activity. Sometimes, he looked busy with his cell phone and sometimes disturbed his friends. I warned him for many times but he kept doing so.

Many students asked about some words they did not understand the English. I gave them 15 minutes to prepare for the role play but most of the groups needed longer time. Most of the students still made mistakes in pronouncing some words and I gave feedback in the end of the lesson. In this meeting, most students started to gain their confidence but few of them were still shy to speak English in the class. I always tried to encourage them many times and reminded them to use their token when speaking. I promised the students to give some rewards if they speak English in the next meeting.

In the third meeting, students learned to be a news presenter as the text discussed was news item. I asked about their favorite news presenter. They began to be accustomed with talking chips. Students answered one by one and they gave a poker card to me every time they spoke. There were only few of them knowing about English news presenter; even some of them seemed to be more interested in gossip or entertainment news. It became my

consideration that the students should work more on English news in the next meeting.

In the group discussion, some students were busy with their own stuffs instead of sharing their ideas with the group. I reminded them that their contribution to the group was scored and then they started to be focused and gave their ideas. In the presentation session, one of the students (FRA) made fun of his friend doing presentation. The good thing was that students looked more confident in speaking than the previous meeting although some of them still relied on their notes and simply read it. In the first presentation, students were reluctant to give comments. When the second group finished their presentation, there was a student (AR) who gave correction on pronunciation and one tip of being a good newsreader that the group missed.

In the fourth meeting, most of the students spoke English very naturally and spontaneously since they were playing a game about Passive Voice. During the review of Passive Voice, students voluntarily answered my question. The students were very competitive and enthusiastic with the games; I found out that most of them have gained their confidence to speak English in the classroom.

I prepared a reward for the winner so that the students became more excited. In the beginning of the game, the class was very noisy because some students were confused about the rule of the game. The observer then helped me to explain the rule to the students. After that, then game ran smoothly. Few students could not answer the questions spontaneously but most of them were very confident. I felt relieved because the students had gained their confidence and most of students were more focused on the activity.

In the fifth meeting, students looked unwilling to study as I told that they were going to work on newspaper. Students were not interested in reading English newspaper; they liked reading about gossip and entertainment news instead. I then told them that they should keep up-to-date to the latest information from all over the world to improve their knowledge. Therefore, students should get themselves familiar with news.

After reading the newspaper, students found many unfamiliar vocabularies. I then asked them to open their *Alfalink* and dictionary to find the meaning. The students worked in groups to find names of people and then classified them based on their jobs. After that, the groups took turn to read aloud their works and followed by the other groups. Students were very competitive in this activity. The group who was able to collect the most stars became the winner. In the end of the lesson, I asked the students' feeling and they agreed that Talking Chips encourage them to be more active in the classroom.

Based on the observation during teaching and learning process, it was identified that there were significant improvements on the students' participation in English class. The improvement of the students' participation in English class can be seen in Table 4.

When implementing the action, I found some strengths and weaknesses in implementing Talking Chips Technique in the research. The strengths of this technique are 1) it gave reason for the students to speak in the classroom, 2) it eliminated dominance in the classroom or group discussion, 3) it overcame psychological barrier faced by the students. While the weaknesses are it did not work for accuracy and did not optimally increase students' spontaneity in speaking English.

*Table 4. Improvement of Students' Participation in English Class*

Students' Participation Before the research	Students' Participation After the research
1) Most of the students answered only when pointed by the teacher, and some of them even only whispered to classmates sitting next to them.	1) Students were active and brave to speak aloud and most of them answered questions voluntarily.
2) There were no question came from the students even when the teacher gave opportunity to ask.	2) Most of the students asked the teacher confidently and they even gave comment to their classmates' answer.
3) Students looked around the class, and he or she would mime when the others answered the teacher's questions.	3) Some students were able to answer teacher's questions spontaneously.
4) Many students rarely participated in the discussion and relied on one or two students regarded as the smartest in the group.	4) Students enjoyed working in a group and gave contribution to the discussion.
5) Students tended to use their mother tongue during the lesson; and they avoided eye-contact with their classmates when talking in front of the class.	5) Most of the students looked confident when speaking English in front of the class although they need a long preparation.
6) They were busy with their own stuffs or did nonacademic activity; and some of them were noisy during the lesson.	6) Students were more focused on the task and classroom activity.

The use of Talking Chips improved the students' participation in English class. Based on the comparison of pre-observation and post-observation score, there were significant improvements described in every aspect of participation as follows.

*Natural desire to participate.* In the pre-observation, this aspect was achieved by the students for 54.2% and it improved to 83.3% in the post-observation. Before the research, most of the students answered only when pointed by the teacher, and some of them even only whispered to classmates sitting next to them. This situation was improved. Students were active and brave to speak aloud and most of them answered questions voluntarily. It is in line with Barkley (2005) statement that Talking Chips is one of the collaborative learning techniques that emphasize full participation and encourage reticent students to speak.

*Confidence.* In the pre-observation, this aspect was achieved by the students for 63.3% and it improved to 88.3% in the post-observation. Most of the students looked

confident when speaking English in front of the class although they need a long preparation.

*Enjoying discussion.* In the pre-observation, this aspect was achieved by the students for 68.3% and it improved to 90.8% in the post-observation. Before the research, many students rarely participated in the discussion and relied on one or two students regarded as the observation in the group. This situation was getting better in every meeting; students enjoyed working in a group and delivered their ideas or opinions using their simple language. It means that Talking Chips had enabled the students to interact with other members of the group. This interaction allowed them to get support or even challenges from their classmates. Hence, the students tended to make effort to be better. It is said by Silberman (1996) that one of the best ways to create active learning is to give learning assignment that are carried out in small group of students. The peer support and diversity of viewpoints, knowledge and skill help to

make collaborative learning become a good part of classroom learning climate.

*Spontaneity.* In the pre-observation, this aspect was achieved by the students for 38.3% and it improved to 53.3% in the post-observation. Students were able to answer teacher's questions spontaneously although many of them still need time to prepare before speaking.

*Focus.* In the pre-observation, this aspect was achieved by the students for 68.3% and it improved to 82.5% in the post-observation. Before the research, students were busy with their own stuffs or did nonacademic activity; and some of them were noisy during the lesson. This situation was gradually improved meeting by meeting. Students were more focused on the task and classroom activity.

Barkley (2005) states that using Talking Chips improves the students' active participation in English classroom this technique creates equal joy to learn, equal share of job and equal chance to practice. The students then have self-motivation to finish their job consciously for their own benefit to have the same chance to practice. Besides, Barkley states that by using this technique, the group members' contribution for the success of achieving the meaningful learning is bigger than using individual technique. Moreover, active learning, equal contribution and enjoyment are achieved optimally through this collaborative learning.

In implementing Talking Chips in teaching and learning process, there were several strengths and weaknesses. By using this technique in the classroom, students were encouraged to actively participate in the lesson. As stated by Millis and Cottell (in Barkley, 2005) that Talking Chips requires the students' surrendering a token, passive students feel encouraged to speak because the ground rules have created an

environment that promotes participants by all. At the first time, students spoke in English because of the rule; students who usually ignored the lesson were forced to be more focused. As they used the rule in every meeting, students got accustomed. They started to find the activities interesting and motivating so at last they were brave to speak English voluntarily and they no longer took English lesson for granted.

Students agreed that they enjoyed contributing in the discussion. Before the research, the students were passive and relied on their friends in the discussion. Some of them said that they were not confident taking turn to speak as their friend, regarded as the observation in the group, always dominated the discussion. This situation was gradually improved by using Talking Chips. Millis and Cottell (in Barkley, 2005) state that talking chips can help to build listening and communication skills because students who tend to "spout off" consider more carefully what they have to say. All students got equal chance to speak so that the problem called 'dominating the discussion' could be solved. Thus, those passive students felt more confident because they got a 'space' to express their ideas; and the rule made them felt that they are also part of the lesson.

Talking Chips also fosters the students' skills of social & higher level of thinking. According to Education Broadcasting Corporation (2004), students learn how to work with others in team and also learn how to response differences when doing discussion. By interacting with others and working together in a group, students are enabled to build their social skill. Kagan (2009) also states that Talking Chips increases the students' higher level of thinking skill. Since there is a step in Talking Chips in which students have to evaluate their classmates' opinions or

arguments, it fosters students' level of thinking skill.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Some progress was definitely made in five meetings. Compared with the students' score before the research, the post-observation score was improved up to 21%, the students' mean score was 11.7 in the pre-observation and it increased to 15.9 in the post-observation.

Talking chips gave reason for the students to speak in the classroom. Students who are usually reticent became more talkative during the lesson. They asked questions to teacher naturally and gave answer or comment voluntarily. Talking chips also eliminated dominance in the classroom or group discussion. Some students were always tried to made themselves outstanding than the others. Having applied talking chips, they were more careful in speaking and gave chance to the others to take turn. Yet, there were some areas where the results of this action research were not as successful as hoped. The students' spontaneity did not optimally improved; they still needed time to prepare before they spoke. Besides, talking chips did not work on accuracy. Students still mispronounced when speaking English.

It is suggested for the English teachers to make a good planning for carrying out a good English class using Talking Chips. Teachers should also create interesting activities and fun learning situation for the students in order to encourage them to give contribution actively to the lesson. Giving suitable topic to be discussed in groups will be effective to foster their social skill and improve their higher-level of thinking. What is more, reward is sometimes needed to motivate the students to be more active during the lesson.

Students are expected to be always active in the classroom. When students actively participate in classroom activities, the acquisition of English competency will be better, especially speaking competency. By watching movies or videos, students get new vocabularies and get good model of fluency and pronunciation to be a better speaker. When they get their vocabulary and pronunciation improved, they will be more confident to participate in the classroom.

The school should motivate the teachers to improve their competence and implement various techniques or techniques to create an effective and successful learning. By providing reference books or sending them to workshop or seminar, teachers' knowledge of how to create active and effective class will be enhanced.

The findings of this research may be inspiring for the other researchers to conduct further research on Talking Chips. Since this research is not perfect, this report may become a reference for the other researcher to answer the problems that have not been answered in this research. It is suggested that before conducting research, find as many as possible books and other similar research to complete the reference of the problems you are going to deal with.

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