

## **RECIPROCAL TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE THE NOVICE LEARNERS' SPEAKING PROFICIENCY**

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**Abstract:** Speaking proficiency becomes a priority in leaning foreign language. However, preliminary observation done showed that speaking skill was not the objective in most English classes. It was also found that the students were passive. By applying Research and Development design of Pimsleur's reciprocal technique, this study aims to improve the novice learners' speaking proficiency. After applying design of Pimsleur's reciprocal technique, there are some results. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the Indonesian adaptation of Pimsleur's method is an appropriate media to teach transactional conversation to low level students. The results show that the simple real situations based audio content is suitable and useful to the students' need. The principles used also ease the students to acquire, store, recall, practice, and communicate in English, as the target language, correctly. And the participants give positive responses to the use of the Indonesian adaptation of Pimsleur's method.

**Keywords:** *Reciprocal Technique, Novice, Proficiency*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Speaking proficiency becomes a priority in leaning foreign language. However, preliminary observation done showed that speaking skill was not the main objective in some English classes. It was also found that the students tended to be silent and passive. The primary goal of most language learners is to communicate the target language when they are trying to get information through technologies. (Harlow and Muyskens in Noom-ura, 2008). However, learners will not be able to communicate effectively without practicing effective listening skills (Nunan, 1997). Thus, the necessity for speaking proficiency is so demanding that teacher should provide both listening and speaking practice at the same time (Brown, 2006). Hadley (in Noom-ura, 2008) suggested that teaching listening and speaking skills helps to acquire a language naturally. Language proficiency grows from oral competence to written competence (Bromley, 2007). The vocabularies they listen and talk are the basic things they need to be able to read and write. Therefore, listening and speaking are the two receptive skills that students should master before they learn reading and writing skill. In designing speaking activities

or instructional materials for second-language or foreign-language teaching, it is necessary to recognize the different functions of speaking performs in daily communication and the different purposes which the students need. Different speaking activities such as conversations, group discussions, and speeches make different types of demands on the learners. Interaction, transaction, and performance are the core issues need to be addressed in planning speaking activities for English class. Procedures for determining needs include observations carrying out different kinds of communicative tasks. The observation for determine students' need then is used to identify teaching strategies to "teach" particular kind of talk.

However, teaching novice learners requires special environment because of their minimal language learning aptitude. Therefore, low level learners need particular classroom activities and leaning technique. Practicing materials which is based on real-life need and applies a 'here and now' context is a suitable design to teach speaking to novice students. The low level learners tend to be short term memory learners; thus they need such activities as in getting and keeping attention, recalling, imitating, and listening and pronouncing all at once. Those principles make the brain naturally stores language in long term memory. In the efforts to improve the novice learners' speaking proficiency, this current study adapted Pimsleur Language Learning System which provides listening and speaking learning activities with such principles needed by the novice learners. Beringer (2004) states that Pimsleur's language learning system is based on applied psychology to aid the foreign language acquisition and the use of memory techniques need an audio presentation. Further, Beringer maintained that Pimsleur's method consists of four main principles: first, anticipation, this tries to get and keep attention; second, graduated interval recall, this presents information at the right time and makes it easier to retrain; third, organic learning which includes vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension; fourth, reproducing by imitating the sound hear. These principles help the brain naturally stores the input in long term memory. The mechanism changes unintelligible human sound into language. This language learning system draws on applied psychology to aid the acquisition of the foreign language, and the memory techniques used require an audio-only presentation. The system does not include written material.

Where to start is a common question in learning new foreign language. Pimsleur suggested learning a few useful things rather than complex grammatical theory. He added that if the learners are difficult to concentrate, they should break up the duration of their study into twenty minutes short bursts. This concept is similar to Bromley's view (in Hidayati, 2014) that teaching fewer words is more effective than teaching many words in a superficial way. The language used in speaking and writing varies in different ways and from one context to another. 'Here and now' concepts used in Pimsleur's method refer to the idea that language varies from one situation of use to another. Most listening class focuses on non-reciprocal learning activities in which the learners have no opportunity of answering back, clarifying understanding, or checking that he or she has comprehended correctly. However, Pimsleur's method requires the listeners to take a part in the interaction. This is known as reciprocal listening. Pimsleur method which gives the learners chance to respond as they might in a

conversational exchange is an appropriate way to develop the learners' auditory comprehension. This method also facilitates language acquisition which the content or listening material is familiar and easier because it is presented in the same sequence as they occurred in the real life. Pimsleur language program provides vocabulary and syntactic structures which are reintroduced at the interval maximize retention. The length of the pause after a prompt is a very important parameter. If the pause is too short, the learners will not have any opportunity to formulate the given sentence before the answer is revealed. If the pause is too short, it will rob the learners' reinforcement and make the overall experience more stressful. On the other hand, if the pauses are too long, the learner may either lose focus or repeat the response twice, potentially cementing an incorrect response or pronunciation. The Pimsleur method involves listening and responding to audio recorded for thirty minutes a day. Most lessons culminate in a simulated dialogue between a recorded voice and the user. The "system" asks question, pauses to give the learner chance to respond, speaks the correct answer, and then pauses to give the learner time to repeat and reinforce the correct answer before continuing. When the pause is of an appropriate length, the illusion or interactive dialogue is surprisingly strong. Pimsleur's method helps people who need to speak another language quickly. The claim is typically that the material will help the language learners, will engage the learners, or will make good use of learners' time.

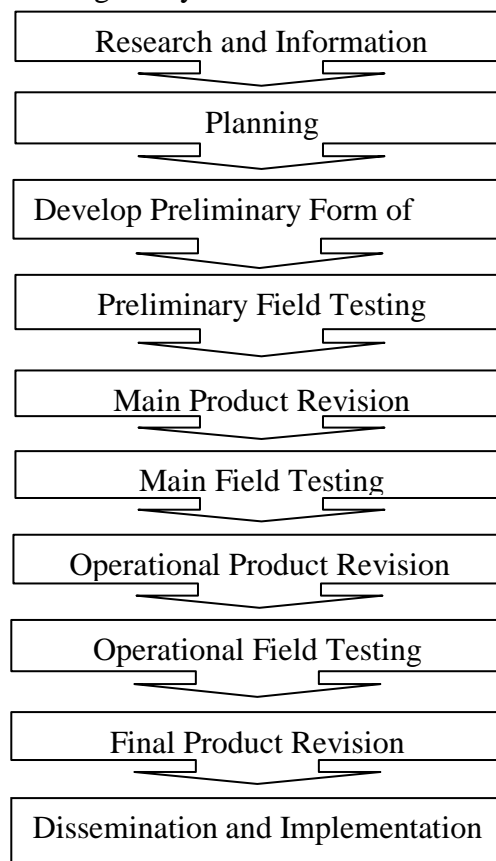
In Pimsleur's method, each lesson introduces five new words and revises recently-learned and older words. The new words are repeated more frequently. Then, the words were preceded by the prompts in the learner's first language is giving opportunity to the learners to recall and speak them before they are confirmed. The method also makes no attempt to teach grammar, but it is limited to vocabulary building. However, that is the most important task for ongoing language acquisition after the foundation has been laid. Pimsleur method also requires the listeners to take a part in the interaction. This is known as reciprocal listening. In other hand, listening class is often listening to a monologue, either "live" or through the media; the listening is by definition, non-reciprocal. The listener (often to his or frustration), has no opportunity of answering back, clarifying understanding, or checking that he or she has comprehended correctly. However, in listening classroom, the listener to be cast in the role of non-reciprocal and become "observer" on a conversation is common. Therefore, Pimsleur's method which gives the listeners chance to respond as they might in a conversational exchange is an appropriate way to develop the listener's comprehension. Also this method facilitates language acquisition which the content or listening material is familiar and easier because it is presented in the same sequence as they occurred in the real life. The Pimsleur language program works well, considering that no natural language understanding has taken place. The effectiveness of the program is based on the concept of optimal interval recall, in which vocabulary and syntactic structures are reintroduced at the interval maximizes retention. The length of the pause after a prompt is a very important parameter. If the pause is too short, the user will not have an opportunity to formulate the given sentence before the answer is revealed; this makes the overall experience more stressful. On the other hand, if the pauses are too long, the learner may either lose focus or repeat the response twice, potentially cementing an incorrect response or pronunciation.

Pimsleur method uses English as the instructional language to learn foreign languages. It will be very helpful for the English speaking country in learning other foreign language; however, it will be difficult for non-English speaking country learners who learn English only as their foreign language; therefore to help them to understand the learning activities, instructional language must be in their mother tongue. The necessity to change the instructional language arises even more in the case of novice learners. In corresponding to it, whereas Pimsleur 'Speak and Read' series of language lesson use English as the instructional language, this current research in which the aims are to figure out how the Indonesian adaptations of Pimsleur's method to teach speaking and how the learners' responses, used the Indonesian adaptation, instead. Prior to this current research, Elementary Portuguese II (EP II) program which adapt Pimsleur's method was designed to teach Portuguese at American University presenting the language as it is spoken by Brazilian people (Kavaliauskiene, 2009). Combining with Rosetta Stone's method, a language learning application in the form of computer aided language learning game which simulates a casual conversation in Mandarin was produced by adapting Pimsleur's method (Goldie, 2011). Both prior researches reported that the adaptation of Pimsleur' method can improve learners' language speaking proficiency.

## **METHOD**

This study used Research and Development method (R & D) since the purpose is to develop a product as a medium to teach English. R & D is a process of used to develop and validate educational products. The steps of this process usually consists of studying and reviewing previous research findings, developing the product, field testing, revising the product until meets its defined objectives (Borg & Gall, 1983). Moreover, Borg and Gall proposed R & D cycle to develop a new educational product which includes several steps as followed: research and information collecting, planning, developing preliminary form of product, preliminary field testing, main product revision, main field testing, operational product revision, operational field testing, final product revision, and dissemination and implementation.

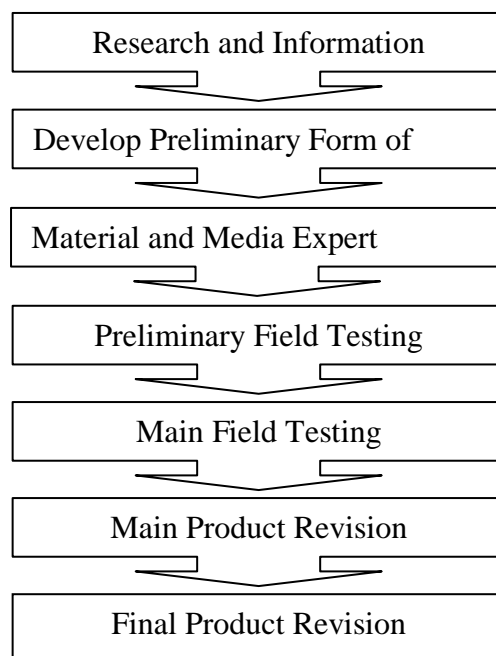
The following is the original cycle of R & D



**Figure 1:** *Original R & D cycle (Borg and Gall: 1983)*

In this research R & D proposed by Borg & Gall (1983) was modified. This study purpose was aimed to develop a product and to investigate the students' responses toward the product without investigating its effectiveness in improving the students' speaking skill. Dissemination and implementation were not included in this current research design since both require a professional work with publisher related to the product commercial distribution. Furthermore, this study was designed to develop Indonesian adaptations of Pimsleur's method as a medium to teach skill of speaking 'giving and asking direction in an airport' to the senior high students.

Hence, the research design used by the researcher was drawn in the following figure.



**Figure 2:** *Modified Research Design*

The research procedure began with prior classroom observation to provide some considerations in planning the product which showed that the students asked the teacher to speak in Indonesian language rather than English. The need of Indonesian language as instructional language during the learning process help the learners focus on the subject matter. Latter, the Indonesian adaptation of Pimsleur Language audio as a medium was planned to teach speaking skill of 'giving and asking direction in an airport' to the senior high students. The audio consists of listening and reading section in which the speakers guided the listeners to read the sentences written in the booklet. Through the learning material planned and validated, the students practiced transactional communication. Preliminary field testing was given to seven tenth grade students categorized as novice learners and the results provided another consideration in revising the product. The main product revision was then tested to know the responses of the students toward the audio and how that could be applied in the classroom. Seven more tenth grade novice students were added in the second field testing in which the class activities were similar to the previous field testing. The results of the second testing became the consideration for the final product revision.

The data were collected using three research instruments which include pre-test, note of field observation, questionnaires, rating scale, and interview protocol. The pre-test which was adapted from Foreign Service Institute was to figure out the students who could be the subjects for this research. It was in the form of self-appraisal or language background to determine the level of students' speaking ability. It consisted of twenty structured questions related to the use of English in daily life. Field note is to determine the extent to which a particular behavior(s) is presented. In this study, a structured questionnaire was used since the researcher employed a fixed number of questions with a limited choice of answer. The researcher made a questionnaire to figure out the students who met

the requirements as the subjects in this research. The subjects were only students who were categorized as novice learners. The researcher made questionnaire for students in the form of self-appraisal or language background to determine the level of students' speaking ability. The questionnaire was adapted from Foreign Service Institute questionnaire which asked the students answer by choosing 'yes' or 'no'. In this study, the researcher made three scales, one for students, one for material expert, and another one for media expert. All three scales had four options in the form of rating based on Likert scale. The four answers strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. A set of interview protocols were also designed to measure students' attitudes and English teachers' opinions on materials and media. Two interview protocols in which each consists of ten questions related to the materials and media were designed to the English teachers to validating the product, especially the content or the materials and the quality of the audio. The other interview protocols on students' attitude which aimed to see the students' response toward the Indonesian adaptations of Pimsleur's method consists of eight statements. It was given to the students after the preliminary and main field testing. Seven students were involved in the preliminary testing and fourteen were in the main testing. All the data were analyzed by applying descriptive interpretative technique.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The validation results on the preliminary form of product showed that the materials meet the students' need for some reasons: first, the use of mother tongue played a big role to motivate the students. Second, the complexity level of the grammar was quite low. Third, the vocabularies were also simple and easy to understand but meaningful. The method of repeating and recalling helped the students to store the input in long-term memory. The audio was a good model since it used the voices of English native speakers.

Following the validation on the preliminary form of product was the preliminary field testing in which the results can be seen in the following table.

Listening Element	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Attractive Material (Q1, Q2)	0	21.4	40.2	38.4
Content Material (Q3)	0	18.6	60.5	20.9
Clearance of Voice (Q4)	0	47.2	46.2	6.6
English Stimulate (Q5, Q7)	0	17.3	39.8	42.9
The task Casualness (Q6)	0	75.6	20.6	3.8
Students'	0	0	19.5	80.5

Participation (Q8)				
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**Table 1: The Results of Preliminary Field Testing**

And the interview results, done after preliminary field testing, show positive responses on the audio. The audio was interesting, helped them to focus more on listening and speaking, and ease them to memorize and recall the vocabularies. The materials were simple but meaningful and useful for their daily life communication. The silent period on the audio provided the students' enough time to practice the language. However, a little obstacle to some students was while they had to answer or reply the questions in long full sentences and the native speakers' accent and speed of speech were a particular language challenge.

The main product revision was done based on the result of the observation during the development process and the interview results on students' attitude and the English teachers' validation on material and media. The material validation suggested that some points of the materials should be revised such as adding few more seconds for the silent period and reducing the time for repeating in some parts. Furthermore, the media validation indicated that adding some music instruments in the beginning and ending of each section would make the students relax and reduce their boredom level and providing more explanation about the reading booklet. Revising booklet which was done by giving more explanation would help the students to understand the reading session. Corresponding to the media validation, the results of the interview done after the preliminary field testing also showed that silent period of several parts did not give the students enough time to think and speak. The adding of few more seconds to the silent period was aimed to give the students more time to recall the vocabularies. A sufficient time maximized them to speak the language. Furthermore, the results indicated that the use of mother tongue lowered the students' anxiety and stress. The mother tongue was a valuable tool to foster a positive environment and motivation to the students. Main field testing was conducted after the main product revision. The results can be seen in the following table.

Listening Element	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Attractive Material (Q1, Q2)	0	0	60.2	39.8
Content Material (Q3)	0	6.2	58.4	35.4
Clearance of Voice (Q4)	0	20.6	52.4	27
English Stimulate (Q5, Q7)	0	7.3	50.1	42.6
The task Casualness	0	35.7	38.4	25.9



(Q6)				
Students' Participation (Q8)	0	0	62.8	37.2

**Table 2: The Results of Main Field Testing**

The interview and observation results done after main field testing indicated the students' positive responses toward the audio; however, little difficulty in understanding the native speakers' accent and speed of speech were caused by their lack of communication experience with English native speakers. Sentence building was quite difficult to the students since they tended to not speak in English during the class. They needed more time to adjust to the new class atmosphere which required them to speak the language. In the efforts to reduce the students' stress and boredom level and provide a signal of different segment of the materials, the second media revision was made by using different music instruments in the transition part between the core part and reading session. The final product revision was based on the interview and observation results done after main field testing. In the final product of Indonesian adaptations of Pimsleur language audio, several aspects were revised and added in which the concerns include the silent period, different music instruments, and booklet.

The listening materials work on the principle of 'here and now' and meet the students' needs, for instance, specific and simple materials with an easy grammatical theory. This idea is leaving the explanation of language formal features and focusing on the language in the real life. Furthermore, the music used in the audio lowered the students' anxiety and stress. Hadley (in Noom-ura, 2008) explained that the teachers should provide a setting where students can enjoy learning with low anxiety, practicing simple and meaningful materials needed in their real life. Moreover, the Pimsleurs' method applies the listening principle of listeners' role as an active participant in the interaction. The audio gives the students chances to respond, understand, or check whether their comprehensions are correct and also facilitates second language acquisition as it focuses on the consciousness role in language learning, and in particular to the role of 'noticing' in learning. Schmidt (in Brown, 2006) stated that the learning process focuses on the input which the learner noticed at. The section that the learner notices is an intake that they later use in spoken production by incorporating the new linguistic things they noticed.

The use of Indonesian language in this method also has an important role as it can lower the students' stress and enhance students' self confidence. The idea of not using the native tongue is because it creates stress to the learners who need a sense of security during foreign language learning (Kavaliauskiene, 2009). The stress caused by the translation process which requires three qualities: accuracy, clarity, and flexibility. It also promotes communication and understanding between strangers (Ross in Mart, 2013). Thus, the use of Indonesian language and translation could help the students to improving their language skills. However, this method does not always result in students' active participation. The observation results indicated that during the experiment some of the respondents found difficulties in recalling the words they listened and noticed. The native

speakers' accent, speed of speech and the task of answering the narrator's questions were the language challenge for some of the respondents. Novice learners should not be expected to have the same successive level as non-novice learners (Noom-Ura, 2008).

However, this audio does not always result in active participation from the students. It can be seen that there were several students who disagree that the task on the audio was easy. They still find difficulties in recalling the words they listened and noticed. During the experiment, they said that the voices of two native speakers were not clear enough. Then, the task of answering the narrator's questions made them think it became a worse situation. This case was supporting the recommendation from Noom-Ura (2008) that low level learners should not be expected to reach the same successive level as good language learners. In this case, teaching speaking skill to the novice learners needs special treatment, because of that the teachers need to make more efforts in teaching those low level learners. In class they are apparently less motivated to learn because they know their English ability is low. When they are less motivated, their ability can never improve. One of the results from the study of Humbpreys and Hamp-Lyons (in Noom-Ura, 2008) showed that unsuccessful language learners believes that teachers paid interest only to successful language learners and did not give them enough help. They felt they were forgotten. Thus, the essential factor to encourage the students to communicate in the target language is how a teacher provides classroom setting and motivation to the students. It is teachers' responsibility to create a class setting which lower students' anxiety and increase their confidence.

Teaching speaking skill to the novice students who are apparently less motivated needs special treatment. Thus, teachers' role in developing better motivation and classroom design is an essential factor to courage the novice students' willingness to communicate for a successful teaching learning. Creating an affectionate class design which lowers their anxiety as well as increase their confidence is a better solution for the novice students to succeed in learning English. Simply, the Indonesian adaptations of Pimsleur's method are an appropriate media to teach speaking of transactional conversation to the novice students. The audio which provides materials needed in meaningful and concrete communication and chances to practice the language and eases the students to acquire the language by storing the target language in their long term memory.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the Indonesian adaptation of Pimsleur's method is an appropriate media to teach transactional conversation to low level students. The results show three things: first, the audio content provides simple real situation which are needed by the students; second, the students are eased to acquire, store, recall, practice, and communicate in English, as the target language; third, the use of the Indonesian adaptation of Pimsleur's method got positive response from the students.

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