A Framework for Empowering Women of Terengganu
via Hybrid English Language Community Based Learning

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Abstract

The Malays are Terengganu's largest ethnic group, accounting for over 95% of the population. English language is treated as a foreign language and rural cultural settings affect English language proficiency. This project offers a successful ongoing community-based model of partnership between university and several women local authority units addressing the issue of anxiety to speak in English. Five women leaders and twenty members of the community, together with three experts were included to develop the model via face-to-face and online teaching and learning sessions. Soft systems methodology (SSM) was applied to tackle the issue of empowering women in Terengganu by improving their English language communication skills. At the end of the SSM process, the Empowering Women of Terengganu via English Language Learning Framework was introduced as a clear guide for the application and implementation of English communication modules. It is believed that SSM can help instructors and policy makers of Malaysian organisations in making a sound judgement in cultivating English Language in hybrid method, and help to develop Terengganu women's potential to be more confident in using English.

1. Introduction

Speak English for Women's Empowerment in Terengganu (SEWEiT) is a 12-week project designed to cater the needs of a group of professional women staff of Terengganu State Legislative Assembly in improving their communication skill in English language. This project was conducted every week for 2 hours from October to December 2020 and joined by a small group of 25 active participants. This project involved three facilitators from the English Language Learning Centre (ELC) of the Centre of Foundation and Continuing Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

The participants have expressed their feedback that this intensive communicative English project has helped them to improve in areas such as; confidence in speaking English, ability to make an English presentation, increased vocabulary, improved pronunciation and improved English communication skills. During the final session, they have stated the good points including such comments as: they were able to communicate confidently now with fellow colleagues; they were able to use English on a daily basis; and most importantly they did not feel pressured or nervous due to the relaxed and easy-going atmosphere. They stressed that they also have tremendously executed tasks given successfully and expressed their hope and intention to join another intensive English speaking program.

Three prominent objectives of this program are:

1) to develop self-confidence among the participants to use English language for the purposes of workplace vocation, leadership, politics and professionalism;

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2) to provide stress-free platform for participants to communicate in English guided by experienced facilitators;

3) to guide facilitators in showing the professional ways of presenting paper works and reports in English at international and press conferences.

2. Literature review

Bringle and Clayton (2012) defined community-based learning (CBL) as a pedagogical approach in professional programs at higher education institutions around the globe. In CBL, students can learn more about themselves and develop a greater knowledge of their personal strengths and weaknesses in their learning. Students can relate and give critical reflection on their learning which can impact their community based on their learning experiences (Wiersma-Mosley & Garrison, 2022).

In this study, researchers infused CBL with a group of professionals to develop their communication skills by providing opportunities for them to speak in the target language. Participants in this study also need to do several projects which involve active participation and the use of social media. Project based learning (PBL) can improve L2 learners' speaking skills from different aspects such as fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Maulany, 2013; Astawa et al. 2017; Nani & Kusumah, 2015). As suggested by Boardman, Garcia, Dalton & Polman (2021), the integration of PBL in L2 study mainly to elevate student's willingness in learning and to make sure they are fully motivated to involve and engage in all classroom activities. Ruslan, Fatimah & Marlina (2021) found that PBL also can increase students' enthusiasm towards learning because when the students are excited and enthusiastic about what they are learning, they often get more involved thus the level of their anxiety is reduced. Therefore, they can expand their interest in that subject and they tend to retain what they have learned, not only for examination purposes. Also, since some of the projects in this study requires the participants to work in groups, the participants also can improve their self-confidence, learn to organize work as a team and work with commitment and responsibility (Jaelani & Afiyattena, 2021).

Currently, due to the Internet revolution, many studies have shown the potential of using social media in teaching and learning. One of the most prominently used social media among Malaysians is Facebook. This study used Facebook as a tool as it has an ability to serve a pedagogical purpose in the field of education and ESL instruction. According to Zarzycka, Krasodomska, MazurczakMąka, and Turek-Radwan (2021), and Wongsa and Son (2022), Facebook improves learners' confidence, promotes collaborative efforts and stimulates active participation among students. Also, it allows users to conduct private and open group discussions online, which are the best platforms for the sharing sessions or formal presentations which can help them to communicate with each other in the target language. The peers also can give comments and feedback to their friends' presentations via Facebook. This is very helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses of their work or performance and also becomes the point of departure for participants to improve their work (Ramdani & Widodo, 2019).

3. Materials and Methods

The problematic situation of empowering professional Terengganu staff in English language learning is considered complex and ill-defined. The reality of the problem of speaking and using English in an environment where English language is less used is perplexing and the people who were invited to define the problem reflected various worldviews, experiences, descriptions of events and activities, and factors that affected the problem situation. Soft systems methodology (SSM) is an interpretivist approach that seeks to identify the human activity systems within the situation and encourage the participants to identify the problem based on their perspectives of the situation being studied (Checkland & Poulter, 2006). Using SSM in this study helped to investigate participants' perspectives, values, and future hope. These activities help to build a rich picture of the situation. The cultural stream analysis and rich picture allowed progression to the modelling stage and the development of root definitions and conceptual models appropriate for improving the situation (Ahmad Tajuddin & Subramaniam, 2015).

In the case of this study, the stakeholders – Terengganu women professionals are the 'interveners' who are searching, grasping and creating the best solutions of the problematic situation of low self esteem professionals in using English language for the purpose of workplace vocation, leadership, politics and professionalism. Applying SSM in this research will hopefully clarify and explore solutions to the problem of incompetence of Terengganu women professionals in English language. SSM acts as a systematic tool to orchestrate and implement change in the real world in topics concerned to human affairs. Its seven-step framework is organised not only to understand the actual problems but also to offer possible solutions and apply desirable changes (Checkland, 2000). Furthermore, stakeholders are involved during all stages (see Figure 1) which will ensure that their needs are reflected in the outcomes and their feedback are adhered to in ensuring the change implemented are valid and reliable.
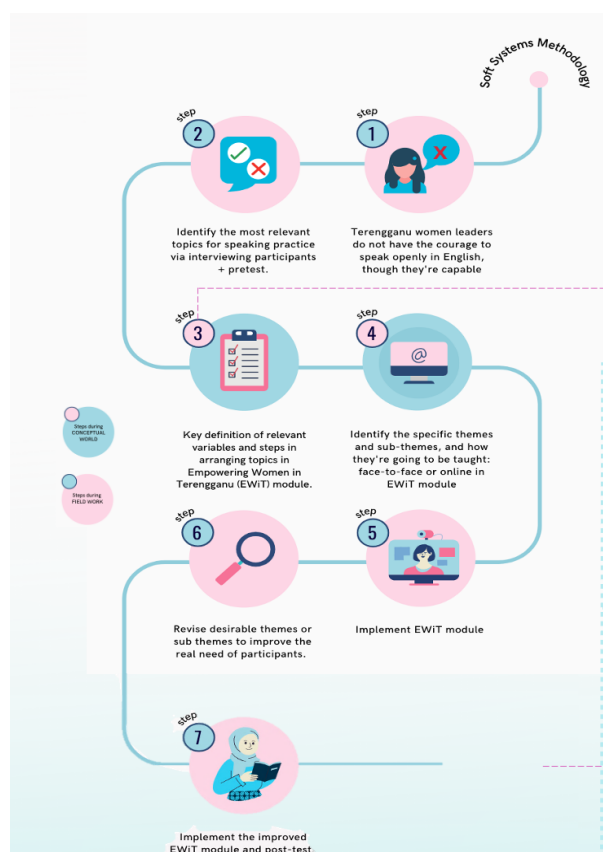
Figure 1 - Seven Stages of Soft Systems Methodology.

Stages 1 and 2

The first role of researchers in the context of SSM approach is to identify the ill-structured problem. For the purpose of this study, SSM was used to assist researchers to explore the real world situation of Terengganu women leaders, in particular, to improve self confidence in speaking in English language.

In stages 1 and 2 the researchers tried to understand the situation by developing the richest picture possible of the problematic situation. The function of these two stages was "to display the situation so that a range of possible and, hopefully, relevant choices [of relevant systems to be described in the following stages] can be revealed" (Checkland, 2000). Rich picture was built by capturing the problem situation; recognising that different groups of leaders had diverse views of this issue and their own experience in having low self esteem in using English at workplace. Through rich-pictures, such different world-views were highlighted.

Undergoing this stage, the researchers began to focus on similar issues which were considered critical as well as eliminating disagreement associated between the stakeholders involved. Focus group interview sessions were held to understand the phenomena. The participants were given an opportunity to define their problems in expressing themselves using English language. It was discovered that 92% of the respondents had high foreign language anxiety which affected their speaking and writing ability in English language. This

relates closely with communication apprehension (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991), whereby 86% of them felt more anxious when speaking in front of the public. Findings during the interview revealed that only 15% of the respondents regarded the rural environment is conducive to helping Terengganu leaders to improve on their English language skills.Only a few of the Terengganu women leaders, which mostly come from the 20-30 year old group, believed that 100% online learning will help to lower their anxiety in learning English language (27%). On the other hand, it was also discovered that they unanimously demanded to learn face-to-face and have additional practices via technology.

Additionally, the areas of concerns by the stakeholders were their line of thoughts were inaccurately described in English language since the lack of vocabulary. Making connections between ideas and being engaged in an on-going speaking process are also other areas of concern. Some even choose to stay quiet during discussions for they were afraid to make mistakes in speaking. The respondents were concerned with grammatical errors made while speaking. Since this is prolonged for quite some time, the professionals became scared and timid, especially if they need to speak in public. The main findings of this stage were factors that constrained usage of English language, which then could be changed into elements for improvement in classroom teaching in the next stages.

Based on the different perspectives of stakeholders, Step 2 of SSM offered three forms of scaffolding in English language learning namely via sensory, interactive and infographics language learning activities. Different learning styles will be used during sensory language learning activities which include hands-on demonstrations, modelings and role play, demonstrating physical activities and watching and reviewing videos and films. Inserting language use and functions during the activities will hopefully help the participants to understand processes, learn by doing and through demonstration, contextualise abstract ideas and make connections between ideas. The activities planned are in the form of interactive ones whereby they need to work in pairs or small groups to ensure the learners are engaged in on-going speaking activities by strengthening their listening and speaking skill.

Stage 3

Meanwhile in Stage 3, Patel (1995) has used SSM's root definitions to identify responsible actors, key transformations, and the knowledge resources that are appropriate to the needs of all stakeholders. A root definition "expresses the core intention of a purposeful activity system" (Wells, 1995) and is structured into three distinct parts: the *what*, the *how* and the *why*. The what is the immediate aim of the system, the how is the means of achieving that aim, and the why is the longer term aim of that purposeful activity. Another significant characteristic of SSM is that the root definition must

include a number of elements, which Checkland and Scholes (1990, pp.32) characterize under the mnemonic CATWOE and the definitions of CATWOE of this study were listed in Table 1 below.

Customer	Terengganu women leaders
Actors	English language instructors
Transformation Process	Speak English for Women's Empowerment in Terengganu (SEWEiT)
Worldview	The belief that the framework will be able to empower women of Terengganu in speaking English and improving their self confidence
Owner	Module developers
Environment	Conducive learning environment both face to face and online learning where learners feel comfortable in practising L2 at their own pace

Table 1 Definition of CATWOE in this study

Stage 4

In stage 4, SSM is used to develop conceptual models that identify patterns in knowledge activities (Venters, Cushman & Cornford, 2002). Such patterns can be used to provide a basis for technical design and organisational and social intervention. Based upon the need to address the problems in Stage 1, ideas and activities in Figure 2 below are being incorporated into investigations in this research.
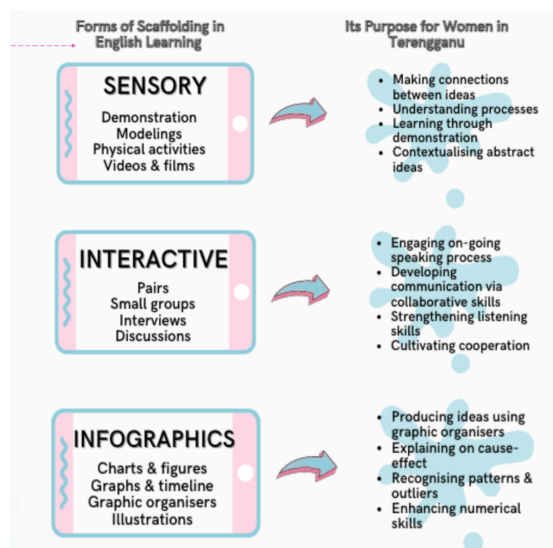

Figure 2 - Forms and purpose of scaffolding in English language learning for Terengganu women leaders.

Specifically, these were the topics that are planned to be implemented within the 12-week period. Speak English for Women's Empowerment in Terengganu (SEWEiT) was designed to include interactive and fun activities to help the participants to practise speaking in English language comfortably as prior to the project, these women have barely used and spoken in English before. It is indeed important to highlight that as compared to any urban area in Malaysia, a vast majority of people in Terengganu may not apply English in their daily life hence lack of platforms and means for any to apply the use of English language. Keeping this in mind, the facilitators created a jubilant environment with the help of intensive and properly-thought after materials in class every week.

In a mission to improve the participants' vocabulary and grammar in every session conducted throughout the project, these language practices were included in all activities:

1) applying transitional signals in phrases and sentences
2) restating and retelling processes to test listening skills
3) expressing contrasting ideas by showing sequence of events
4) using expressions and phrases on how to agree, disagree and interrupt.

A collective of collaborative activities were assigned to the participants. Table 2 below shows the topics taught in a module called Empowering Women in Terengganu (EWiT) in English.

Assimilating the use of technology in the module helps the participants to be more connected to the substantial demand of virtual professional communication by interacting profusely via Facebook which was chosen as the module's learning platform alternative. Instructions were given on the Facebook group in a form of infographic posters together with elaborate samples of assignment videos.

String of sentence construction lessons both in videos and notes were provided as deliberate guidelines. Once their user-generated content videos were uploaded on Facebook, comments and suggestions by fellow participants were posted in group discussions. Constructive feedback gained immediately and consistently as they securely used erudite expressions and phrases whilst expressing thoughts.

Stage 5

In Stage 5, Empowering Women in Terengganu (EWiT) English Module was implemented. The module took 12 weeks to complete, and the tasks and learning outcomes were listed in Table 1 above. Tasks were given weekly and feedback was given offline and online.

Prior to the given assignment, they went through the process of learning as suggested by the stakeholders during Stage 2 of SSM (see Figure 1).

Topic	In-class Task and Learning Outcomes	Post-class Task
Cook-a-Dish	to demonstrate how to a cook a dish of their choice individual task where each of them had to demonstrate how to a cook a dish of their choice	Tell me a piece of advice you've received from someone about tips and tricks in the kitchen. Why do you remember this advice till now?
Let's Promote Terengganu	to defend and voice out their opinions of topics/scenarios given	Tell me a place in Terengganu that you have visited recently. As a visitor, make a 2-minute review about the place.
Blind Dates	to interview others (roughly 15 minutes per round before they change partners); To use proper expression and phrases To use in questioning and answering session	Tell me something about yourself. Inform your current post and your job responsibilities. Tell us one experience that happened at work that means a lot to you.
T-Kitchen Fieldwork	to create a YouTube video on the main dishes by T-Kitchen for promotional purposes	Reflect on the experience of fieldwork. Did you enjoy it or not? Why?
Storyboard Mission	to create a storyboard To publish a video on promoting products in Terengganu.	What Terengganu products do you use at home on a daily basis? Why do you think it is useful to you?

Table 2: Topic of Empowering Women in Terengganu (EWiT) English Module

4. Results

Stage 6 and 7

In getting back the feedback from the students, they opined that the stages of teaching and guiding them to think better were one of the factors that they did well in the assessment. The lecturers agreed that the reason why

the majority of students were able to achieve an excellent level in the assessment was because of the strategies implemented during teaching. Some comments were as follow:

> *"..having a clear, current and meaningful stimulus was essential for me to feel connected with the assignment, which makes it easier to find references online."*

> *"the lecturer thought us how to ask good questions. Love that session. Asking, mmm, rephrasing my questions will help me to find interesting answers."*

> *"Questioning skills session should be prolonged. It helps me to think better."*

> *"I learned that I cannot speak without substance. I need data, I need references, I need other case study that I can infer my points with. When we speak with data, then people will listen to you."*

> *"Talking to others in a group helps me to generate creative ideas. Having academic discussions in solving real issues helps me to be tweet intelligently."*

> *"The lecturer's feedback during our presentation was awesome, then we realise how we can do better. I mean, we thought ours was the best, but when we heard others'... we know we can definitely be more innovative."*

Comments on having to talk about the issue several times with others and going through and referring to credible sources in answering the issues helped the students to strengthen their language skills.

> *"When we talk about the issues, it helped to get the vocabulary... you know, sometimes the words just fly from your mind, especially when we speak in public. But if you practice, it is easier."*

> *"Finding the best graph or figure that directly related to the (assigned) issue was not easy. The good thing was I went through a lot of articles that widen my view and the readings helped me to borrow relevant phrases and some cool quotes, too."*

In learning online, some faces issues in collaborating at given time because of the internet connection. Nonetheless, the tried to resolve their problems by creating other sessions which suit the group members. One also emphasised on the importance to have a committed team member in order to complete the tasks.

> *"I need committed friends to help me brainstorm ideas, especially when we learn*

online. Sometimes we need to work at night to solve the issues given."

"Internet line is usually better at night, so we always do a lot of discussion pretty late at night."

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Collaboration in reviewing and giving feedback

In a conducive and non-threatening environment, the participants were enthralled to a set of well-documented interactive tasks which required them to communicate in English by referring to their schemata in projecting ideas. This can be observed during the first task where the participants were instructed to talk about a local dish in Terengganu of their choice and prior knowledge embedded with each own respective cultural-local background were articulated. At the beginning of the task, constant help for vocabulary to create chains of thoughts was intact as they struggled to construct their sentences and fellow participants were more than willing to give out words. Brainstorming ideas and planning out the words to say asked for short discussions amongst them and these have assisted them in projecting more recollection of experience to share with everybody. This has made them become more interactive and responsive as they gave feedback and responses to other participants' dish demonstrations.

Higher motivation because of distributed practice

This project was initially developed to cater the needs of the participants who were passionate and dedicated in tackling their anxiety in communicating in English language. Positive attitudes towards the materials laid out for them helped in ensuring the smooth execution of each and every activity planned out. Participants were focused once assigned as each task required each of them to get involved in the process of brainstorming and discussing with fellow group members in using the second language. It may have taken them aback for a while as normally anxiety took control at the beginning, however once interest and passion kicked in, they began to actively participate.

It was apparent from the data collection from the participants that the motivations for improving their communication in English language were consistent. Almost all participants stated and stressed out clearly that being able to speak in English was very significant so they could communicate with foreign delegates and fellow conference attendees, and most were enthusiastic about learning and improving their capabilities in the working environment.

It is truly found that motivation is one of the factors that affects language learning. Keeping that in mind, most activities designed in Speak English for Women's Empowerment in Terengganu (SEWEiT) were career-related and community-based so that participants would

not shy away from their scope of work. Fully aware of the significance of practising English discussing matters pertaining to work-related materials, participants actively learned and completed the tasks. Motivation could be clearly seen in cognitive perspective during the interactive activities. They attempted to integrate English language into local cultures and surprisingly global perspective. It can be seen clearly during the execution of group discussion on Leadership and Promoting Terengganu.

Furthermore, fieldwork and excursions to places of importance and related to workplace helped participants to enhance their vocabulary, especially the words used within the industry visited, and experience the process and procedures during fieldwork. This experiential learning helped the participants to be able to explain confidently in their video reflections. Since the task needed them to record themselves and post it to the social media platforms, they underwent a few speaking practice sessions, prior to the final recording. It is proven that the participants' did not show obvious anxiousness in the reflection video and they were able to explain their experience and feelings after the sessions in a comprehensible and fluent manner. Hence, this finding is in agreement with Chang's findings (Chang, 2019) whereby repeated practice will improve fluency. In addition, the familiarity and venturesome-experience of participants using Facebook also contribute to the lack of agitation and stereotyped self-inferiority complex in executing the assigned tasks.

However, a few participants tend to be irresponsive to tasks especially the ones where they were asked to do an individual presentation. They performed fairly acceptable during group discussions but retracted if eyes were upon them. This may be associated with one's introvert personality but when asked, being detached to scope of work related to foreigners contributed to this lack of interest in conversing in English. Whereas, for a number of participants that need to be constantly dealing with global out-reach networks, they performed better during tasks. Strack, Lopes, and Esteves (2015) suggested that "while some individuals experience anxiety as incapacitating … others seem to thrive in similarly adverse circumstances" and "the latter may be driven to work harder when they experience anxiety in the face of difficult challenges" (p. 579).

After the process of re-evaluating the data the elements within the Framework for Empowering Women in Terengganu (FEWiT) was improved and finalised. From the process of face-to-face and online learning and teaching that was carried out for 12 weeks, it was discovered that to enable the women leaders' language learning and self-esteem to thrive, they need to be guided in different ways and tasks must be assigned creatively and innovatively. By giving a meaningful stimulus or assignment, participants tend to solve them by using vocabulary and language structure presented in class effectively, which is to use their language skills into fullest potential. Guiding them step by step using

FEWiT helped to improve the women leaders' self-esteem in speaking the English language. It is believed that if this framework is applied in community-based learning English courses in suburban areas of Malaysia, participants' will not be afraid of using the language in public. All in all, after reviewing the data, the improved Framework for Empowering Women in Terengganu lays out six basic elements as a guide for learning L2. FEWiT is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 - Framework for Empowering Women in Terengganu (FEWiT).

Acknowledgement

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