

## USING T-P-S TECHNIQUE TO MAKE PASSIVE STUDENTS BECOME ACTIVE LEARNERS IN EST LESSONS

By

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### **Abstract**

*This action research was done to find out whether the 'Think-Pair-Share' technique introduced by Kagan (1994) could be used to encourage passive students participate more actively in class. This paper presents how the research was carried out in a Form 4 science stream class during an EST lesson in SMK St. Luke, Sri Aman and the findings obtained. 5 students were chosen; 4 boys and 1 girl. This technique provided opportunities for students to share thinking in a non-threatening way, moving from private to shared, public discussion of ideas. During this activity, students had individual time to think about a question related to the topic of studies. They then paired up with a partner to share their thoughts. Finally, the pairs selected one major idea to share with the entire class. Data was collected through observation, interviews and journal writing. I find that this technique works well for students who are not confident in expressing their opinions in class due to shyness.*

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

English for Science and Technology was introduced as an elective paper for upper secondary school students in this country three years ago. The syllabus was written in line with globalisation and advancement in information and communications technology (ICT). It is geared towards preparing students for this new era by training them to gain knowledge and use it for advancement in various fields, especially in science and technology, and studies at tertiary level. The main aim of this syllabus is to provide students with the language basis to access and understand materials on science and technology and to express ideas and concepts in English (Syllabus Specification for EST).

In my school, it is compulsory for all the students in science stream to take this subject. There are many different kinds of attitudes shown by the students towards the study of this subject. In the two Form 4 classes that I am teaching, the students in the first class (4 Utarid, pure science class) are generally more interested and responsive as compared to the second class (4 Zuhrah, semi science class). Some of the boys in the class are proactive and they like to ask questions on the topics taught. But of course there are many passive ones who usually sit at the back of the class and accept everything that the teacher teaches. The number of such students is more than half of the total number of students in that class (there are 33 students in that class, 12 boys and 21 girls). Teaching this class is sometimes a joy but at times, it can be an agony too when very few students responded in class. When this situation happens, normally I will tell jokes to attract their attention.

From my observation, I found that a particular group of students were not responding in class mainly because they were not confident to speak in English. I used to ask a few of them individually about this and they said that they are not daring enough to respond in English. The level of comprehension on what the teacher teaches in class is about 60% (from the first monthly test in February 2005). May be there are a handful of them who are quiet and passive by nature, but I would say most of them are not because they converse confidently to me and to their friends in their native language outside the class.

The main focus of my study is on this particular group of students who are very quiet, passive and very rarely give responses in class. This does not include those who are quiet and introvert by nature.

## **MY CONCERN**

I would like to describe a particular EST lesson in 4 Utarid that I hope would clearly showed the problem that I was facing in that class. The focus is on students' participation, especially those who were passive during my lessons.

The topic for that day was "The Water Cycle". It was a 40 minutes lesson. I started with a few oral questions about the water cycle. Only John, Peter and Sam answered my questions. Then I asked them to look at a diagram of water cycle and explained the diagram to them. In the process of explaining, I also asked a few questions based on the diagram. Penny, Annie, John and Nicholas answered the questions. Annie just whispered the answers while Penny, John and Nicholas answered confidently. Then, I gave them some short notes to help them write a short paragraph on the water cycle. I went through the short notes with them. Then, we made oral sentences together. At this stage, I could hear more voices. They came from Anna, Grace, Sam, Peter, Nicholas, Tom, Elain, Annie and again John. John is the most active student in the class. He is quite competent in English and he is very confident in speaking because he is a school debater. Lastly, I asked them to write out the paragraph individually.

The number of students participating in this particular lesson was about 10 only. Since this class is the best class in Form 4 in terms of achievement, I would expect at least two third of the class members participating in the lesson. Maybe the activities that were carried out did not require lots of responses, but almost the same thing happened in every lesson; only about 10 of them responded. At times, only Jesse, Neil and Petrus participated in the lessons.

My target group consists of those who are extrovert but passive during my lessons. They were Federick, Ivan, Lam Geok Jin, Tom and Adam. Through this research, I expect these five students to be more confident in expressing their opinions and ideas in class and thus able to participate actively in class in the near future.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of the study is to improve my own teaching practices and to use other teaching technique to make passive students into active learners in EST class. Besides encouraging students to participate in the lessons, hopefully it will also build up the students' confident in expressing their opinions in English and to make EST lessons more enjoyable and meaningful both for the students and the teacher.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What should I do to improve the students' participation in class and to boost up their self-confident?
2. Could 'Think-Pair-Share' (T-P-S) technique introduced by Kagan (1994) help the passive students in my class?

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

Three methods namely observation, journal writing and interviews with the students concerned were used in collecting data in this study.

### **1. Observations**

Observations were done by two parties: the researcher herself and the other students in the class. I observed the students' reactions during presentations in class. I used the 'time frame' method. I jotted down those students' behaviours every now and then by stating the times during the lessons in an observation sheet during each lesson. Besides that, I asked the other students to do the observation and fill in the observation sheet, but they did not use the 'time frame' method.

### **2. Interviews**

Interviews were carried out with the students on a one-to-one basis. I met the students in the counselling room. These sessions were recorded in a special note book.

### 3. Journal writing

I wrote journals after every lesson. I recorded down incidents during the lesson and my own feelings and thoughts. Besides that, I also asked the 5 students to jot down their participation in class and also their feelings in a piece of paper.

I have planned to use the T-P-S technique in 4Ud class during the first semester but unfortunately, on many occasions, either the students or the researcher herself were not free and not in class during EST lessons. So, the plan was delayed until the second semester.

### WHAT IS T-P-S TECHNIQUE?

'Think-pair-share' technique provides opportunity for students to share thinking in a non-threatening way, moving from private to shared, public discussion of ideas. During this activity, students will have individual time to think about a question related to the topic of study. They will then pair up with a partner to share their thoughts. Finally the pairs will select one major idea to share with the entire class.

The teaching steps/ principles are as follows.

1. Generate a higher-level question related to the topic you want students to study;
2. group students into pairs;
3. pass out a T-P-S worksheet to each student;
4. give students 5-10 minutes to write down their individual thoughts in the 'THINK' section of their worksheet;
5. then, in pairs, they share their individual thoughts. They should summarize their common thoughts in the 'PAIR' section of their worksheet;
6. finally, they choose one major idea to share with the entire class. This should be written in the 'SHARE' section of their worksheet.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF T-P-S

I told the students the week before that I wanted all of them to be in the class on 20 June (Monday) because I wanted to carry out a 'project' in their class. All of them waited anxiously for me to enter their class on that day. As soon as I put my things on the table, some of them started to ask me questions, such as, what were they supposed to do? What was the 'project' about? What is it for? I asked them to sit down and listen to my instructions.

I called out 10 names and asked them to sit in pairs. John and Ivan, Peter with Fred, Sam paired up with Tom, Elain with Lam and Nicholas with Adam. The rest of them were asked to remain with their friends next to them as shown in Diagram 1.

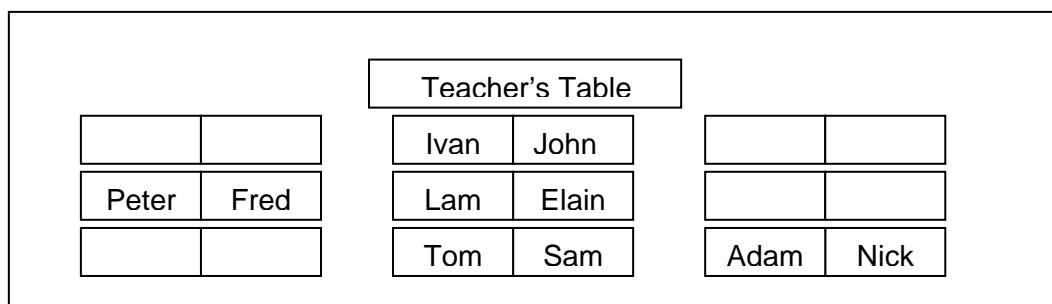


Diagram 1: The sitting positions of the students in 4Ud classroom

Then I gave them the topic: *Does Internet bring more harm or good to teenagers?* I explained to them the task and they started immediately after that. They were told to do the 'Think' column in the worksheet on their own for about 5 to 8 minutes and then I would give them signal to start discussing for the 'Pair' column later. Example of T-P-S worksheet is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The 'Think-Pair-Share' worksheet

THINK	PAIR	SHARE
I thinki ...	We both agree that ...	We both think this is important ...

Since I have only one period (1130 – 1210, 40 minutes) in the class, I asked them to do the 'Think' and 'Pair' columns only. The 'Share' section would be done in the next lesson two days later. The 5 chosen partners were asked to assess their friends by filling in the checklist given. They had to tick under the 'Yes' or 'No' column after reading each statement. Table 2 shows the checklist concerned.

Table 2: The checklist

My Name	:	
My Partner's Name	:	
<i>Tick the appropriate column after reading each statement.</i>		
<b>What I have observed in my partner ...</b>		
	Statement	Yes No
1	He/She showed interest in the topic given.	
2	He/She completed the 'THINK' section of the worksheet.	
3	He/She gave opinions during 'PAIR' session.	
4	He/She was very enthusiastic and proactive in giving idea (s).	
5	He/She was very willing to share the idea(s) discussed with the whole class.	
6	He/She is more active in class today.	
7	He/She has the potential to speak more confidently in English in class.	
8	He/She has shown improvement in terms of participation in class.	
Comment: _____		
_____		
_____		

I was very happy to notice that all the five of them were very attentive in doing the 'Think' column. Ivan, who was sitting right in front of me, was seen thinking hard and staring at the worksheet given. He stopped writing after about 5 minutes and I asked him why. He said he had not much idea on the topic given because he seldom surf the net. His father does not allow him to use the Internet and so there is no Internet access at home. I asked him to write whatever he can based on his general knowledge and at that time, his partner John offered to help him. I asked John to hold on and let Ivan tried again for another 2 or 3 minutes. Ivan told me that was all he could think of (about 3 to 4 short sentences). So, I allowed John to help him (John had almost completed the whole column with 6 main ideas). So, they started their discussion; or rather I should say, John giving his views to Ivan and Ivan could be seen copying down John's points onto his worksheet. He told me later that he admired John for being able to come out with so many ideas.

Lam, who was sitting behind Ivan was also thinking hard. At times, she rubbed her pen against her right cheek or bit her pen, trying to get some good ideas, I guess! Her partner, Elain was very obedient. She did not disturb Lam but did her work quietly on her own. So, Lam was left alone to think hard for the answers. I could see that she was not very confident. So, I told the class if they were not sure of any words or spelling, they could ask me.

Behind Lam was Tom. He had a very proactive partner, Sam. Though I have told them not to discuss for the 'Think' column, he was seen talking to Tom 2 minutes after they started their task. Then, I stopped him and asked him to give Tom a chance to express his opinions on the topic given. He agreed and they carried on with their tasks. Tom's face looked confused a few times and I asked him whether he had a problem. He was not sure whether to give opinions on one side or both sides. I explained to him again that he had to choose one side and give at least 3 reasons. After that, he continued with his work diligently.

Adam, who was sitting on my left, did not hold his head up during the first 5 minutes; was very engrossed with the task given. At times, he tapped his pen very lightly on his desk, trying to 'knock out' some ideas from the desk? Then, he talked to Nick, asking him how to write the points (I looked at them as they were talking, then the clever Nick told me what was going on). Then, they carried on with their task.

Fred and Peter, on my right, were a perfect match. They seemed to enjoy doing the task together because they smiled to each other when they received the worksheet. Fred spent a few minutes in deep thought and wrote down his points. He looked confident in writing his own ideas because he did not ask his partner anything. Before I gave them the green light to start the discussion, Fred and Peter have already started talking and laughing in their private conversation. When I asked Fred whether he has completed the 'Think' column, he said 'yes'. And so has Peter.

At about 12.00 noon, I told the class to start their discussion. Fred and Peter were very fast. They shared the same opinion and so, they were able to complete the 'Pair' column in 2 to 3 minutes' time. Adam and Nick were very serious in their discussion because they were not on the same side. Nick told me they were debating when I turned my attention towards them. I nodded my head signalling to them to carry on. Lam asked whether she could retain her ideas and wrote down Elain's under the same column because it seemed that neither one of them wanted to agree with each other opinion. I permitted her to do so and she was happy because she smiled. Ivan analysed John's ideas and copied them down. They shared the same opinion that Internet brings more good to teenagers. Sam and Tom also shared similar opinion. So, they were also very fast in their discussion. At the end of the lesson, I told the class they have to get ready for presentation in two days' time. The five chosen students would present first. I saw Lam and Tom shaking their heads. I guessed they were not willing to do the presentation. But I nodded to them to say that they must try. Ivan nodded when I looked at him. Adam was still in a state of confusion. He looked lost! I guessed he and Nick had not come to an agreement. Fred confidently nodded with a big smile. So, the first part of the plan was carried out smoothly (still too early to tell whether it's a success or not!)

Two days later, as soon as I entered the class, I asked the 5 students whether they were ready to present. Tom and Adam said they were not quite ready. So, I asked them to get ready while the rest presented first. I gave out the observation sheet as shown in Table 3 to the rest of the students and asked them to jot down what they saw in class especially on their friends during the presentation. They were allowed to use Bahasa Melayu if they wanted to.

Table 3: Observation sheet

<p>OBSERVATION SHEET <i>Write down what you saw on the 5 presenters during their presentation.</i></p>
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Ivan was the first one to present. His stand was Internet brings more good than harm. He used notes prepared earlier. He read directly from the notes but there was some eye contact with his classmates. He raised his eyes once in a while. He was able to present fluently and his pronunciation was good. He looked quite confident. After the presentation, Peter and Sam asked him questions and he was able to answer them confidently - surprisingly! His friends clapped after he answered the questions. Actually I was worried that he might get nervous and not able to say anything. I guessed his friends felt the same way too. His partner, John was eager to help him but I stopped him. I told him that we must give Ivan a chance. But in order not to disappoint him, I let him said something after that.

During interview, Ivan said that he is not confident to converse in English mainly because he is shy. With friends, he could express his opinion – of course not in English but in his mother tongue. However, he admitted that conversing in English is not a big problem to him. He has the ability to speak well but he just cannot do it in public (class). He said that T-P-S helped him to be more confident in giving opinion in class with the help of his partner, John. He is confident that he will be able to present his views in class in future without any problem if I continue to use this technique. I could see the joy on his face for attempting something new successfully.

Fred was the second presenter. He started off in a humorous manner. He purposely said his greetings in a joking way by raising his voice. I thought he was trying to get rid of his nervousness. Anyway, he looked confident. He was able to pronounce well and presented fluently. He also read from the prepared text but maintained eye contact with the audience. Both he and his partner agreed that Internet brings more good to teenagers. He was able to answer the questions raised by John. He seems to know quite a lot about Internet. His partner, Peter was also eager to help him though he could answer the question being posed. Peter still insisted in saying something. His wish was granted. Fred said that he does not have many opportunities to converse in English because there are many other languages and dialects that he can use. With friends, he usually uses Mandarin and dialects like *Hakka*, *Hockien* and *Teochew*. With teachers, he often speaks in Bahasa Melayu, except with his English Language teacher. He said that he needed time to form sentences mentally before he could say them. Thus, he is not in favour of using English in daily conversations.

Lam was very nervous when she was called to the front. She fixed her eyes on the piece of paper she was holding and read directly without raising her eyes. Her pronunciation was not very good as it is with a strong Chinese accent. She presented both sides; she was against the topic but her partner was for the topic. Her body moved slightly to the front and then to the back. She was really nervous! I thought her friends knew this and no one asked her any question. Actually she was looking at them with a kind of 'pleading expression' on her face, as if she was telling her friends, "*Don't ask me any question.*" She was so relieved when she was allowed to go back to her seat. Lam told me during the interview that she is not proficient in English and could not pronounce well. She is not confident in presenting her ideas in English unless she is given ample time to prepare for it. She felt that the T-P-S technique has helped her to express her ideas in class with the help of her partner, Elain. Elain helped her to form proper sentences before her presentation.

Tom looked worried as he walked to the front. He put out his tongue like a small kid before he started. Oh, my God! He was very nervous, more nervous than Lam. His voice was trembling! He did not start immediately but waited for a while to calm down. During his greetings, his friends laughed when he said, "*... and teachers.*" That helped him felt less tensed because he laughed with them. He put his right leg to the front at one time and then brought it back again. This was repeated a few times during his presentation. He read from the prepared notes and he mumbled a few times softly in the Iban language. His pronunciation was quite good and he had eye contact with his friends. He put his left hand in his pocket. When he finished his presentation, John asked him, "*Who prepared the notes for you?*", Tom answered immediately, "*Me and my mentor.*" The answer triggered laughter again in the class. Then it was back to normal. While we were waiting for the next question, suddenly Tom asked, "*Any more question?*" That caused the class to laugh again. Then he turned to Peter and asked, "*Peter, any question?*" Everyone laughed again. Peter answered, "*No, no question.*" Then, Tom said thank you and returned to his seat. He really surprised me! I thought he was not going to present well but he was the most liked by his friends. He managed to create the 'feel free and comfortable' atmosphere in the class. Thank you, Tom!

Adam was the last one to present. He looked serious and cleared his throat before he started. He also read from the prepared text like the rest. He had eye contact with his friends but not so much. He presented fluently and his pronunciation was good (I never know that). He did not show any sign of nervousness and looked quite confident. No question was asked and Adam walked back to his seat happily.

Then, I asked the rest of the students to complete the observation sheet and hand in to me. I set the time for the 5 students to see me individually during the following day. The class was dismissed at 10.50 a.m.

A few incidents were out of my expectation. I have always thought that Ivan was not responsive and did not participate in class because he is not confident to speak in English. In fact, he was also lacking in terms of knowledge and information on the topic given. That may be the case for some other students in class too. All this while, I know that Tom's ability to write in English is considered above average; but I seldom hear him conversing in English. I never expected him to be able to crack jokes in front of the class. Have I under-estimate him? He is better than I thought. As for Lam, she is exactly as I have expected her to be. She is not confident mainly because of her pronunciation and accent. As stated by her partner, Elaine (in her observation sheet), if she is given more opportunities, she will be able to speak well. Tom's presentation was also unexpected. I know he gets nervous easily (sometimes when he was asked to help the teacher to do something in class, he looked nervous too). I never know that he can create something to calm himself down; very few students can do that. Maybe he did not do it on purpose, the action just came out suddenly (he confirmed later that he did not expect himself to do that also; asking question to the class and to Peter). I realized that different students possess different potentials and abilities, especially when they are nervous. Adam's presentation is within my expectation, but I did not know he can pronounce well (since there is no oral test for EST). Maybe I should give every student in that class a chance to present something in class, then I can get to know them better and know their real abilities and potentials?

#### **METHODOLOGY/DOCUMENTATION**

During those two lessons, I used Observation Sheets to record my observation. The rest of the students were also asked to observe and to record down what they noticed in class especially on the reactions of their 5 friends during presentation in the Observation Sheet given. During the lessons, I recorded the students' actions based on the different times throughout the lesson. It was not easy to run the class, control the students and record things happening in the class at the same time. I might have missed some little but important reactions of the 5 students, but I believed I have recorded most of their reactions. The rest of the students had no idea on what to see initially. After giving them some examples, some of them were able to do the task quite well. But most of them were still blurred and did not know what to write. The events recorded by the students were almost the same as what I have recorded. However, some differ from mine. For example, some students noticed that Fred was not confident but I think he was. On the other hand, some felt that Tom was confident but I think he was not quite confident. Anyway, it was interesting to read what the students have written about their friends. I allowed them to write in Bahasa Melayu because most of them would not write if I insisted on English.

The interviews with the students were carried out in the counselling room the following day. It was done on a one-to-one basis. The 5 students came to talk to me one at a time. This is a good sign.

The other document is the journal, written by the 5 students and me. I encouraged the students to write long journal, but most of them were not able to do so. That shows students are not used to writing long essays or articles; even on something which is very close to them – their own feelings and performance. No wonder English teachers (including me) often complain that most students are weak in writing.

In their journals, all of them admitted that this technique has helped them in gaining confidence in speaking in front of the class (including Fred). They were all surprised when I paired them up with a friend in class. Later, they realised that their partners were able to help them in doing the task given. They were nervous when they were asked to present, but most of them were able to calm down during the presentation. They hope that this technique will be used often in class.

## INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The data collected during the course of this study is very straightforward because all of them are in the form of writing – records from observation, notes from interviews and journals. Thus, findings can be obtained directly from the documents above. There is no need of calculations and other forms of interpretation.

From what I have gathered from the students' observation sheets, almost all of them stated clearly that their friends (the 5 chosen students) performed better with the use of T-P-S technique in participating more actively in class. They also seemed to be more confident. In fact, they all believed that these 5 students have the potential to speak well in class and be more interactive if they are given more chances to practise under this technique. I shared the same opinion.

Through the interviews with the 5 students and after reading their journals, I am able to conclude that they have confidence to be better and more active learners if T-P-S technique is used continuously in class. T-P-S is well-received by the students and it is proven to be an effective way of encouraging passive students turning into active learners particularly in EST lessons since it could increase their self confidence and prepare them for class interaction.

## REFLECTION

The main aim of this study was to improve my own teaching practices and to use other teaching technique to make passive students into active learners in EST class. Besides encouraging students to participate in the lessons, hopefully it would also build up students' confident in expressing their opinions in English and to make EST lessons more enjoyable and meaningful both for the students and the teacher. After carrying out the plan, I noticed that this technique is very suitable for passive students. From the data collected, it shows very clearly that all the 5 students like this technique and they hope that I will use it more often in class. Quoting Ivan, *'I hope Miss Lucy will always use this method during EST lessons.'* In terms of building self confidence, this technique has done a great job because students said that their level of self confident has risen through this technique. Tom wrote in his journal – *"This gives me more confident to present in class one more time."*

It was a joy to see students participated well and corporate with me in carrying out the plan. Though they did not understand fully what this study is for, they gave their full support and contribution. Actually, the 5 chosen students and their partners felt very much honoured to be in my list. In fact, most of the other students (the unchosen ones) looked envious when I gave instruction to their friends (the chosen ones).

Initially, I planned to carry out the plan during doubled-period lessons. But due to a slight change in my timetable, I have to split it into two. When I think of it now, it might be a blessing in disguise because with that, the students have enough time to get ready for their presentations and at the same time, able to realize the usefulness of the T-P-S technique.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many implications that I can gather from this study. Below are some of the important ones.

1. Passive students can be encouraged to become active learners using suitable teaching techniques such as 'T-P-S';
2. students with low self confident level in using English in class can be prompted to use this language in class interaction with a suitable technique like 'T-P-S';
3. this technique can be applied in other subjects as well; as long as there is a topic given for discussion and the students have some prior knowledge on the topic given;
4. this technique may not work for students who are not willing to try and prefer to stay passive;



5. this technique is time consuming; time for discussion and presentation, so teachers may not want to use it;

Some of the recommendations that I would like to make are:

1. teachers should use this technique in teaching especially when students' opinions are needed and there are many passive students in class;
2. this technique does not need any teaching aids, so it can be used anytime and anywhere (even under a tree!);
3. this technique is simple and easy to follow. Thus, teachers do not need to explain to the students, just give instructions!

## **CONCLUSION**

Can I say that this study has been carried out successfully with a favourable outcome? I guess so because looking at the results gathered, I can say that students like the T-P-S technique and it has helped them in participating more actively in class, without feeling shy and not having confidence.

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## **Ringkasan Sesi**

Soalan 1: Adakah hanya 2 hari pemerhatian mencukupi untuk membuat rumusan seperti yang dinyatakan? (Cikgu Abang Adenan)

Jawapan: Pembentang hanya menjalankan satu kitaran seperti yang diminta untuk tujuan pembentangan (Cikgu Lucy)

Komen: Dalam PT, masa yang lama diperlukan untuk merancang atau mengutip data. Tetapi pelaksanaan boleh dibuat dalam masa 2 hari/ singkat. Pembentangan esok akan mengupas paradigma PT dan kaitannya dengan kajian kes serta generalisasi (Pn. Chuah).

Dilaporkan oleh:

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