Promoting Interaction among Students in the English Second Language (ESL) Learning Through Interactive Tasks

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Abstract: *It has been researched that children as young learners in the teaching learning process have their own characteristics. From the very early stage in their development; children like to make social interactions, even if the participants are themselves. They interact with their peer, talking and giving inputs and feedback to each other. The purpose of this research is to describe the characteristics of the interactive tasks which can promote interaction among students.*

This paper belongs to Research and Development (R and D). Starting with identify learners' target situation, select theoretical views of language, identify linguistic features of target situation, create syllabus, and design materials to exemplify syllabus items, then continuing with implementation process and revision until getting the final product.

The result of this research is to promote interaction among students in the ESL learning, interactive tasks is a good choice. By using interactive tasks, there will be a communication among students as indicator that the interaction occurs there.

Keywords: *interaction, students, tasks, esl*

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of English Second Language (ESL) is now expanding into young learner's participants. One of the reasons is that young learners at this level have potential competence in learning language. Their mental and cognitive development brings a new paradigm about language learning in an early period. Based on The Critical Period Hypothesis developed by Vygotsky in Cameron (2001:13), children might learn a second language more effectively because their brains are still able to use the mechanism that assists their first language acquisition. According to this, one of the ways to develop competence in second language is via language acquisition that is using language for communication. The process of communication among students can indicate that there is an interaction among them in the classroom.

In line with interaction, Vygotsky in Woolfolk (1995:50) moreover suggest the term about zone of proximal development (ZPD) to describe the readiness and capability of children to receive help from their social environment. Related to this, this paper will discuss about promoting interactions among students especially in the elementary level as one of the best strategies in the English Second Language (ESL) learning. In this learning process, by communication, students are able to interact with others/peer.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Children Learning Strategies

Brown (2000) writes one of the children learning strategies that are social strategy. The social strategy of children learning category consist of three skills: asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others feeling.

Asking question can be done for clarification or correction (Brown: 2000). For example, in a dialogue children may ask their friends as speakers to repeat what has just been said. In other words, it can be said that children in this case asking question to verify about something. Then, for correction, it might happen when children want to get peer correction in the process of learning language.

Moreover (Brown: 2000) states that there is sub-skill in this strategy involving the interaction among learners in order to improve their language skills. This sub-skill is cooperating with peers. Cooperating with peers can be in the form of pair work, small group work, or large group work.

The last one is empathizing with others feeling. It is related to the children understanding and becoming aware of others thought and feeling (Brown: 2000). In relation to these learning strategies, children try to be aware of others thought and feeling.

2.2. Grouping Learners

2.2.1. The Advantages of Whole-Class Grouping

Williams and Burden in Harmer (1998: 114) says it reinforces a sense of belonging among the group members, something which was a teacher need to foster. If everyone's involved in the same activity, then the teachers are all 'in it together.' Such experiences give the teacher points of common reference to talk about and can be used as reasons to bond with each other. It is much easier for the students to share an emotion such as happiness or amusement in a whole-class setting. Twenty people laughing is often more enjoyable than just two; forty people holding their breath in anticipation create a much more engaging atmosphere than just the person sitting next to you.

Also it is suitable for activities where the teacher is acting as a controller. It is especially good for giving explanations and instructions, where smaller groups would mean having to do these things more than once. It is an ideal way of showing material whether in pictures, texts, or on audio or videotape. It is also more cost-efficient, both in terms of material production and organization, than other groupings can be.

Moreover it allows teachers to 'gauge the mood' of the class in general (rather than on an individual basis); it is a good way for us to get a general understanding of student progress. Furthermore, it is the preferred class style in many educational settings where students and teachers feel secure when the whole class is working in lockstep, and under the direct authority of the teacher.

2.2.2. The Advantages of Pair-Work

In pair-work it dramatically increases the amount of speaking time any one student gets in the class. It also allows students to work and interact independently without the necessary guidance of the teacher, thus promoting learner independence. Besides, it allows teachers time to work with one or two pairs while the other students continue working, also recognizes the old maxim that 'two heads are better than one', and in promoting cooperation helps the classroom to become a more relaxed and friendly place. If teacher get students to make decisions in pairs (such as deciding on the correct answers to questions about reading text), the teacher allow students to share responsibility rather than having to bear the whole weight themselves. In addition it is also relatively quick and easy to organize.

2.2.3. The Advantages of Group-Work

Like pair-work, it dramatically increases the amount of talking for individual students. Unlike pair-work, because there are more than two people in the group, personal relationships are usually less problematic; there is also a greater chance off different opinions and varied contributions than in pair-work. Also, it encourages broader skill of cooperation and negotiation than pair-work, and yet is more private than work in front of the whole class. Furthermore, it promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decision in the group without being told what to do by the teacher. Finally, although the teachers do not wish any individuals in groups to be completely passive, nevertheless some students can choose their level of participation more readily than in a whole-class or pair-work situation.

2.3. Interaction

According to Brown (2001:165) interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Furthermore, Rivers (1988:3) states that interaction involves not just expressions of one's ideas, but also about comprehension of those of others. One listens to others, one responds (directly or indirectly); others listen and respond. The participants work out interpretations of meaning through this interaction, which is always understood in a context physical or experiential, with nonverbal cue adding aspects of meaning beyond the verbal. Chaudron (1988:10) affirms that interaction in the classroom has been attributed to interactive features of classroom behaviors, such as turn-taking, questioning and answering, negotiation of meaning, and feedback.

2.4. Interaction among Learners

Interaction between learners can occur in group work. Cohen (1980: 14) says that the kind of group work useful for more routine types of academic learning differs from the kind of interaction desired when the objective is learning for understanding or conceptual learning. For conceptual learning, interaction between learners should be more a mutual exchange process in which they share ideas, hypotheses, strategies, and speculations. For more routine kinds of learning, the learners may help each other to understand what the teacher or the textbook is saying and they offer each other substantive and procedural information.

Furthermore, Rivers (1988:78) states that opportunities for interactions among students are greater in a small group activity than in large groups. Students receive much more attention to their individual problems and feel more personally involved, because they can no longer hide in the crowd.

2.5. Long's Interaction Hypotheses

According to Krashen's input hypothesis (Brown: 2001:361) that learning a language proceeds naturally form one step of acquisition another. Krashen's (i+1) means that for acquisition to take place, the learner must only be input material (1) which is one step ahead of his or her base competency (i), for example someone who is learning to ride a bike. At first (i) to be possessed is for him or her to be able to wheel the bicycle around. After he or she got this (i), we van then begin to add (1) in the form of mounting the right food on the peddle, keeping the left on the ground. We have a first (i+1) which becomes the second (i). The second (i) is the ability of the learner to peddle the bicycle using the right foot while still stepping the left foot on the ground. Then, second (1) which can be mounting the left foot on the left peddle. The (i+1) now consists of learner's ability to mount his or her right foot on the right peddle (i) and the addition of (1) which is the mounting the left foot on the left peddle. This principle seems to be what happens naturally in the development of a child.

Long went on to propose an extension of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (i+1), which has come to be called Interaction Hypothesis. From the perspective of the Interaction Hypothesis, such collaborative efforts between more and less fluent speakers should be very useful for language learning. They are collaborating to ensure that the learner is receiving i+1 in Krashen's terms. As Larsen – Freeman and Long (1991:144):

Modification of interactional structure of conversation… is a better candidate for a necessary (not sufficient) condition for acquisition. The role it plays in negotiation for meaning helps to make input comprehensible while still containing unknown linguistics elements, and, hence, potential intake for acquisition.

In his recent writing, Long re-defines the Interaction Hypothesis as follows:

It is proposed that environmental contributions to acquisition are mediated by selective attention and the learner's developing L2 processing capacity, and that these resources are brought together most usefully, although not exclusively, during negotiation meaning. Negative feedback obtained during negotiation work or elsewhere may be facilitative of L2 development, at least for vocabulary, morphology and language-specific syntax, and essential for learning certain specifiable L1-L2 contrasts. (1994. p 414)

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that children should communicate with their peers/friend in English in order to receive ideas or feelings from their friend, as he can give herself attention to ideas or feelings. They have a compelling need to communicate in order to fulfill their need that is to receive ideas or feelings from their friends.

Based on the Long's Interaction above, in this process of communication there will be a process of negotiation for meaning among students. The process of negotiation for meaning will help them to make comprehensible input. Since the comprehensible input and feedback from their peers is an important thing that becomes an influence to children development, there should be advisable for an instructional process to be built form a no form point to a step-by-step advanced point.

3. METHODOLOGY

Adapted from Hutchinson dan Waters (1987), the procedure of this research as follows:
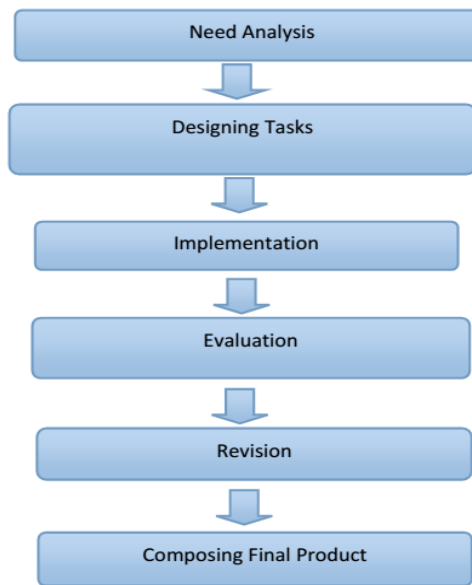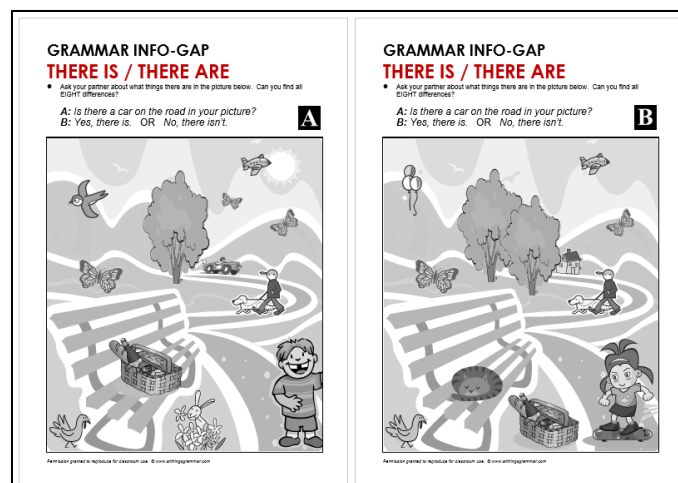

Diagram1. *Procedure of R and D research*

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Based on the data gathered from the first questionnaire for students, the researcher found some insights about the students' need that can be summarized: Regarding to the description of students' need, students' attitude, and enthusiasm toward English all students were happy with English (100%). Related with task goal, most students hoped that by learning English, they could practice to spell some words or sentences in English better (90%). For the input, most of the students preferred to have pictures (69%) or dialogues in it (53%). The activity types and the skills they want to master are speaking (80%) and reading (73%). Most of students preferred to do the tasks in pairs (73%) and small group work (30%).

From the interview with representation of students, it can be concluded that actually the students were very happy with English lesson. However, in extended time, they found difficulties in vocabulary. Furthermore from the interview with teacher, the teacher said they need some tasks that quite communicative and can promote interactions among students in the learning process. In addition, the teacher said that the theme should be related to the student's daily life.

After the data gathered, the researcher designed some interactive tasks and then implemented the tasks to the learning process. By passing the process of implementation-evaluation-and revision, finally the tasks divided into three types: a) information gap, b) role play/drama, and c) survey game.
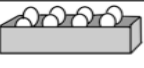
a. Information Gap

b. Role Play/ Drama

c. Survey Game

5. CONCLUSION

Interaction among students in learning English at the second language can be used as one of the strategies in the classroom. Based on the children personality development proposed by Vygotsky in Cameron (2001) and also Long Interaction Hypotheses above, learner's especially young learners students should have a compelling need to communicate in order to fulfill their need that is to receive ideas or feeling from their friend as he can give herself attention to ideas or feelings. In line with this, interaction becomes the best strategy to be conducted. In this process of communication, there will be a process of negotiation for meaning among the learners. The process of negotiation for meaning will help them to make comprehensible input. Furthermore, the comprehensible input and feedback from their peers will become an influence to children development.

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