

TEACHERS' STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

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Abstrak

Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa yang penting untuk dipelajari karena sangat banyak digunakan dalam ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi. Namun, masih banyak pendidik bahasa di Indonesia yang belum menguasai bahasa Inggris dengan baik meskipun diajarkan sebagai bahasa asing pertama di sekolah menengah. Diantara banyaknya diskusi tentang faktor yang menyebabkan pengajaran dan proses belajar tidak berhasil, faktor terpenting yang mempengaruhi kompetensi bahasa seorang siswa akan dijelaskan dalam artikel ini. Dengan kata lain, motivasi siswa secara positif sangat berpengaruh terhadap hasil belajar siswa. Motivasi siswa disebabkan oleh banyak faktor, yang paling utama adalah kemampuan guru untuk mengatur kelas. Dengan demikian, makalah ini memberikan beberapa cara para guru harus dilakukan untuk meningkatkan kompetensi siswa mereka seperti secara aktif melibatkan siswa dalam belajar dan memberikan umpan balik kepada siswa saat proses belajar berlangsung.

Kata kunci: keterampilan reseptif, kemampuan yang produktif, bahan authentic

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is considered as the main subjects in secondary schools as it is assessed in the national exam. In most secondary schools (junior and senior high schools), this language is taught approximately six hours per week. With considerably intensive meeting and the assumption that Indonesian students have learnt English for 6 years in secondary schools before attending university or college, students should have had a good English. However, students feel English is difficult, and their language incompetence become a concern for education minister (dikmenum.go.id/rancangan-strategis).

Many argue that the problems above are preceded by some factors, such as teachers' competence, teaching methods, and students' language background. This paper, however, proposes discussion on what factors have positive influence to one's language competence than to enlist aspects causing the problem. Before discussing about the factors influencing one's language competence, I need to introduce what language skills one needs to perform.

This is important since the language assessment investigates many different language skills. Therefore, although most people agree that speaking is the most striking feature of one's language ability, we must also consider the language competencies which are usually examined in the international language competence testing systems.

English language competence includes one's capabilities in comprehending the language as well as ability in using the language. These skills are examined in the official language testing system such as IELTS and TOEFL. This idea comes up with two different skills, receptive and productive skills. The receptive skill involves the abilities of learners to understand the English text (reading) and discourse (listening). While productive skill embraces the speaking and writing.

The aforementioned four language skills can only be gained through continuous and integral practice. To succeed in receptive skills, for example, learners need to accustom themselves to the English discourse, and understand the linguistics rules of English. To acquire productive skills, students need to practice of using English in regular basis. Those skills affect each other. A person will be able to speak English fluently only if he or she is able to grasp the authentic English utterances. Similarly, if students understand English text very well, they possibly can write an English text.

How to enhance students' language competence

Scholars of second language acquisition have researched factors influencing language learning outcome such as learner's motivation, language background, economy and learning process etc. These factors are classified into two, individual characteristics and socio contextual factors. Individual characteristics include motivation, belief, risk taking, anxiety, and intelligent (Oxford, 1992) while the social contextual factor comprises teaching method and assessment (Politzer, 1983).

However, there is lack agreement to what the most effective factor which enhances learning outcome because there is no single dominant factor leading to the success or failure. Oxford (1992) found that certain internal factors such as *risk taking*, does not create a consistent result for all learners because it interacts with other factors like self esteem, anxiety and learning environment in a complicated way to produce certain learning outcome.

In spite of debate on the factors influencing the second or foreign language achievement, experts believe that students' motivation--which is considered as a drive directed towards a goal--is the most important aspect in learning. Students with higher

motivation gain better English than those who are less motivation (Cook, 2000, Johnstone, 1999, cited in Wan-er, 2008). Similarly, motivation is the very first step for learners to achieve language competence.

Once we consider motivation as the main factor to language learning, we are required to understand how to evoke students' motivation. The writer argues that motivation can be initiated by external factor even though there is an assumption that motivation is merely preceded by learner's individual characteristics.

As motivation can be evoked by both internal and external factors, language teachers' are required to find out what to trigger students' enthusiasm in gaining their best language performance. Teachers need not only to show how English is becoming more vital for their future, but also required to have abilities in creating such an atmosphere in order to make students interested in the subject.

The friendly atmosphere for students to learn is critical to evoke students' motivation. Hence, teacher's preparation and ability to manage classroom is important. There are three activities supporting the well organized classroom. They are involving students in the learning process, preparing interesting materials and actively give students' positive feedback.

Involving students in the learning process

In learner centered concept (rather than a teacher entered concept), students' involvement in the learning process is required so that students will feel that the classroom is theirs, not merely belong to the teachers. If students feel so, they will be easily able to engage the lesson. Students will be more active to share their ideas, to speak up with the target language, and evaluate their own mistakes.

The concept is also considered as the reform from old paradigm—that student is the object of learning—to the new one in which student is perceived as the subject of learning process. There must be a space in the language classroom for students to speak English so that students will be more active to practice language in the language classroom. By giving the students opportunities to develop their own language, students will be responsible for their own learning.

In the classroom teachers' point of view, students' involvement is important to motivate students since the classroom is lively arranged. Classroom boredom does no longer exist because students are actively involved rather than listening passively the teachers'

explanation. Teacher asking question, students answer the question and respond every issues that teacher introduce. And also, students might respond whatever their peers propose.

Furthermore, students involvement in the learning process enhances students' academic performance (Rao and DiCarlo, 2001). This has been suggested to develop creative thinking, judgement, interpretation, and problem-solving skill. So that, in language classroom, students' involvement will boost not only students' speaking ability but also improve creative thinking and interpretation. They are accustomed to express their ideas with proper language.

Using Interesting materials

Another way to invoke students' motivation is the teachers' interesting material. Interesting materials are meant to be the materials which are related to students need and their knowledge. Such interesting materials will make students tune in the subject because they understand the use and the function of the materials for their life. They do not learn the materials which are quite different from they find in regular basis. This can be illustrated by the use of the weather forecast in future tense lesson. With weather forecast students are let to predict the costume they are going to wear, the things they are going to bring on the following day. Also, this could be the English news report from certain newspapers to identify the use of past tense.

The availability of such interesting materials above—which are appropriate with students need—used to be demanding for language teacher. In the past, the materials constructed by native speakers are hard to find. For most Indonesian teachers the authentic English books were less affordable. However, teacher now can easily find many kinds of interesting resources from the internet. These include mp3 for listening practice, interesting reading and writing materials.

In my view, if the language teachers are able to find the authentic materials which are arranged by native speakers, the classroom will be not only attract students' interested but also let them learn how the sentence structured naturally, the suitable words to put in certain context and the expression used by the English native speaker. The various materials such as children story, music, texts in terms of news report written by native can be initiated. In this case, student's interest will end up with students' motivation.

Feedback on students' work

Students will be motivated to learn the subject if their assignments and their works are appraised with proper feedback. Feedback is defined as information supplied to learners concerning some aspects of their task performance, with a view to enhancing teaching practice (Anusiene, et.al, 2009). This encompasses not only correcting trainees but also assess them. Correction and assessment depend on mistakes being made, reason for mistakes and class activities

Similarly, Snyder (1971) found that assessment—which investigates how students went about their learning—has influenced the students most rather than teaching itself. With assessment, students understand what need to take as important aspect of learning and know the progress they should achieve.

Although such correction and feedback are helpful both in oral and written work, there are important point to bear in mind. In language classroom, teachers should know when to give correction on students' language mistake and errors. For example, many argue that teacher should not directly correct students speaking practice because this causes students' hesitation in speaking. There must be a proper way to correct students' mistake.

As a conclusion, feedback must be positively enhancing students' motivation to learn the language as well as contributing to the learning progress. Hence teacher should not only correct the mistake but also give complimentary to any progress the students have achieved.

CONCLUSION

English is regarded as an international language which assists people to face the global market as well helps scholars to learn and study all disciplines. Also, with proper English, Moslem scholars can spread Islamic values to the world.

Based on the English competence test, there are two main skills to measure, receptive and productive skill. To enhance receptive skills, teachers need to accustom their students in English discourse by using interesting materials. Likewise, teachers need to by actively involve students in the learning process in or 5 o practice their productive skill. The last but not the least, teachers need to give feedback to students learning progress.

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