

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROBLEMS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The problems of English teaching in Indonesia have been by many experts and practitioners in the field. Most people focus on the suitable methods of teaching. Some of the methods that have been used are grammar-translation method, direct method, structural method, reading method, audio-lingual method, situational method, total physical response method, and communicative approach. As a result, Indonesian government or the department of education keeps on changing the methods of teaching English as a foreign language. It is true that we need to keep up with the progress in teaching methodologies. But there are many other factors that we need to consider when we want to be successful in our English teaching program. First of all, the teaching of English as a foreign language has always been considered very important in Indonesia in order to be able to compete with other countries in terms of science, commerce, and technologies. But in real practice the government does not seem to show seriousness in the matter. Let us look at the curriculum and syllabus. In a way, the content of the English syllabus is very dense. It covers all the language skills and components. But the result of the teaching learning process is still not satisfactory. When we look at the teaching-learning process that has been done in public schools, we can probably say that the unsatisfactory result was caused by some factors. First of all, language teaching is different from other subjects teaching. Language teaching is not just a matter of teaching the knowledge. It is more of teaching the skills. It takes a long time to train someone to become fluent in using the language skills. In reality, the class size is usually big while the allotted time for English subject is very little and the meeting frequency is very low. A Foreign language must be taught intensively in small classes with high frequency of meetings. It is best if it is conducted on the daily basis so that the students can achieve quick results and progresses. When the students can feel the progress, they will be motivated to learn more.

Keywords: English, language teaching, problems

INTRODUCTION

English as an international language has always been included in school curriculum because it is considered very important for developing science, commerce, and technology. There have been a lot of efforts and finances invested to support the English teaching programs all over the country. The government has been changing the methods of teaching English in order to get better results. However, we always hear complaints about the unsatisfactory results of the English teaching in Indonesian public schools. We rarely see a high school student who can communicate in English. When we happen to see a student who can use English, we can predict that he or she must have taken additional English courses outside the school. He might have joined a private English

course or might have invited a tutor to train him or her to use English at home. Without having additional courses outside schools, it is not likely that a high school student can use English fluently.

When we look at the school curriculum, we can say that the materials are too much. The curriculum requires students to master the four language skills and language components such as the grammar and the vocabulary. But when we see the number of students in every class, we can say that it is too big. It is practically impossible for the teacher and the students to master the materials. In my opinion, English teaching must be conducted in small classes so that every student can get the chance to practice using the language in real communication. In other words, language learning needs a lot of practice. Without sufficient practice, it is impossible for the students to be able to use the language fluently. In reality, the students can not use English well.

Another problem is the limited time allotment provided for English lessons. In general, the time for English lessons is not enough for the students to learn and use the language. Most students learn English just to satisfy the school requirement so that they can graduate from their schools. They do not really feel that it is very important for their future.

Brief Review of Related Literature

Foreign language learning is a complex process and different scholars or experts offer different methods to achieve the goals. Some theories concerning language teaching and learning spring from behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructionism and each of them has strengths and weaknesses. Some methods of teaching that have been applied by language teachers are the following: Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Structural Method, Reading Method, Audio-lingual Method, Situational Method, and Communicative Approach. Behaviorism stresses on student's observable behavior to create automatic learning, including the instructional cues, practice, and reinforcement. The role of the teacher is to determine what type of cues that can produce the desired response, to create conducive situations to achieve the target by providing stimuli in conducive environmental condition. According to behaviorists, second language acquisition is the acquisition of a new behavior. The environment is the most important factor in learning which involves developing responses to environmental stimuli. If the responses receive positive reinforcement, they will become habits. If the responses receive punishment, they will be abandoned. Therefore, the students learn a language through habit formation. Students learn a language by imitating sounds and structures that they hear in the environment. Language learning is considered similar to any other kind of learning. Learning consists of developing responses to environmental stimuli. To learn a second or foreign language, a student must imitate correct models repeatedly. (Patten & William, 2008). Richards, et. al (1986) stated that behaviorism has an important influence on psychology, education, and language teaching. Behavior is interpreted in terms of stimulus and response. The process of language teaching and learning can be explained in terms of conditioning, a process of shaping and molding of behavior. Desired behavior is induced, whereas undesirable behavior is extinguished.. According to Eapen, some implications of behaviorism toward language teaching and

learning are the following: Language is learnt only through use and practice and it cannot be taught without context or situation. Production of correct linguistic response requires effort and attention. The spoken language comes before the written form. Learning is faster when the learner is placed in a situation and when the correct response to a stimulus is immediately confirmed or reinforced by further practice. Structural linguistics contributes to the emergence of Audio lingual method based on the theory of behaviorism which states that language learning depends on habit formation. Bloomfield (1942:12) stated that language learning is overlearning and anything less becomes useless. The implication of this statement is that students should repeat a certain pattern until they master it and it becomes automatic. Teaching techniques utilize repetition of dialogs and pattern practices for the purpose of automatization. According to Rivers (1964), Audiolingualism has the assumption that habits are strengthened by reinforcement, foreign language habits are formed by giving the right response, and language behavior can be learned by inducing students to behave. Positive reinforcement of accurate imitations and correction of inaccurate imitations facilitate the learning process. Active student participation is an important element of the learning process. Ideal learning conditions occur when there are plenty of accurate models and immediate constant feedback. Students should be exposed to a lot of target language examples. They should imitate the target language examples repeatedly and receive appropriate feedback. An English teacher is expected to know linguistics or applied linguistics so that they can give feedback and correction to the students.

Cognitivist stresses on the process that occurs inside the human mind, the acquisition of language, and the internal mental structure. The role of the teacher is to understand the position of the students who have different experiences that will influence the learning outcomes. The teacher also determines the most effective manner to organize new information and provide feedback. Chomsky (1964) stated that human language cannot be explained simply in terms observable stimuli and responses. The generative transformational linguist is interested not only in describing language, but also in arriving at an explanatory level of adequacy in language study. According to cognitive psychologists, meaning, understanding, and knowing are significant data for psychological study. They try to discover underlying motivations and deeper structures of human behavior using rational approach. The learning processes according to the cognitivists are the following: The learner considers a new situation as a problem to be solved. The learner analyzes the problem and tries to identify the elements or the components of the new situation. The new situation is compared with the previously encountered situation using a mental 'filing index' system to find out if it is similar or different. The comparison will result in a plan or strategy to deal with the new situation by testing it. The plan is tried out to see if it works or not. If it works, it is stored in the filing system for future use. But if it does not work, it is abandoned. According to Gas (2003), interaction in language learning is stimulated by communicative pressure and it examines the relationship between communication and acquisition and the mechanisms such as noticing and attention that mediate between them. Input refers to the language that is exposed to the learner and it is an essential component for learning in the sense that it provides the crucial evidence from which learners can form linguistic hypotheses. Interaction refers to the conversations that learners participate in. Interactions provide

learners with information about the correctness and incorrectness of their utterances. Long (1996) stated that there is a strong relationship between interaction and learning. Interaction approach attempts to account for learning through the learner's exposure to language, production of language, and feedback on that production. Interaction and learning can be linked using cognitive concept derived from psychology, such as noticing, working memory, and attention.

Constructionism stresses on how to construct the meaning of a word or thing based on the student's understanding. It can be carried out through individual experience and schema. The role of the teacher is to ask the students to learn to construct meaning, assimilate and accommodate the student's prior learning to the new ones. Bown (2001) stated that constructionism is a school of thought that emphasizes the learner's role in constructing meaning out of available linguistic input and the importance of social interaction in creating a new linguistic system. According to Taber (2006), constructionism theory has the following characteristics: Knowledge is actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from outside. Learning is something done by the learner, not something that is imposed on the learner. Learners come to the learning situation with existing ideas about many phenomena. Some of these ideas are ad hoc and unstable; others are more deeply rooted and well developed. Learners have their own individual knowledge and understanding about the world, but there are also similarities and common patterns in their ideas. Some of these ideas are ad hoc and unstable; others are more deeply rooted and well developed. Learners have their own individual knowledge and understanding about the world, but there are also similarities and common patterns in their ideas. Some of these ideas are socially and culturally accepted and shared and they often part of the language, supported by metaphors etc. Language teaching has to take the learner's existing ideas seriously. Learners construct their knowledge through collaborative interaction with the physical world in social, cultural, and linguistic environment. There are different varieties of English and the distinctive features can be described and taught through the use of appropriately selected texts and carefully devised practice exercises (Howatt, 1984:222). Basic language is made up of sentence patterns, structural or functional words and non-structural vocabulary which are common to all scientific disciplines and form the essential framework upon which the special vocabulary of each discipline is superimposed (Ewer and Latorre, 1969: ix). But in general, it is always better to start teaching English for general purposes first before teaching English for specific purposes. The reason is that the general English is basic or fundamental for communication. It is not likely that the students will be able to cope with English for specific purposes without being able to use general English.

There are many theories related to second or foreign language learning and acquisition. The theories may be related to other fields of knowledge or science. For instance, according to psychology some people read and comprehend written texts faster and better than others. People vary in their abilities to retain information in their memory. In other words, people vary in their memory capacity, in the sense that some people have greater capacities for processing information compared to others. (Patten and Williams, 2007). Generative linguistic theory on second language acquisition tries to explain and account for the nature and acquisition of interlanguage competence

(White, 2003). Language use is assumed to be based on an abstract linguistic system, a mental representation of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The knowledge of language is unconscious and it is derived from universal grammar. Our knowledge of language goes beyond the input in numerous ways. People can understand and produce sentences that they have never heard before and they know that certain structures are not grammatical without being taught. They also know that certain interpretations of sentences are not possible in certain contexts.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia has always been considered important and a lot of efforts have been made from time to time to improve the results. At one time it was inserted into the school curriculum starting from elementary school up to the university levels. Then at another time it was started from secondary school up to the university levels. Later it was started from the kindergarten up to the university levels. In the past, private schools and institutions have started the English teaching from pre-school or kindergarten or even playgroups. They believe that the sooner the English teaching is introduced, the better the result will be. But the problem is that not many parents can afford to send their children to private pre-schools because it is considered costly. Some parents who have enough budget send their children to those private schools because they consider it a prestige,

There have been many methods of teaching English as a foreign language offered by experts. Each of them has strengths and weaknesses. There is no single method that can overcome all English teaching problems. Things depend on the objectives of teaching English as a foreign language. Some English courses focus on the speaking ability and they use dialogs and conversations until the students are capable of expressing their ideas using English. Others may stress on reading ability and therefore use various reading methods to achieve the goals.

Titone (1968) mentioned two basic held positions in English language teaching. The first is form-focused teaching which emphasizes the teaching of the rules of grammar, structures, the vocabulary development, and the language sounds. The second is meaning-focused teaching which emphasizes language use, communication fluency, and appropriateness of expressions in different situations. Applied linguistics focus on the fields of linguistics and psychology to provide more effective teaching methodology. Corder (1968) stated that applied linguistics is a collection of applications of linguistics at various levels of language teaching operation. Cook and Wei (2009) stated that applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field. It can deal with practical language and communication problems by identifying, analyzing, and solving processes utilizing available theories and methods. Rosenbaum (1966) mentions two objects of linguistic research; they are: to determine precisely the constraints or rules that govern the form of the constructs employed in the linguistic description of human language.

Halliday, McIntosh, and Stevens (1965) stated that linguistics is very relevant and useful to second language teaching. Linguistic description of language components of language teaching is very useful for language teachers. Language teachers receive knowledge of linguistic theory to teach language. Linguistics contributes to the theory of language teaching. The knowledge of linguistic theory is used as a device to help

language teachers. Chomsky (1964) considers the grammar of language as something that enables us to specify rules which constitute competence in a native speaker.

But we can probably say that linguistics cannot be separated from language teaching field. We can see, for instance, the contribution of phonology in enabling teachers to diagnose the students' problems in pronouncing words and give them feedback for correction. By knowing articulatory phonetics, English teachers can give solutions to the students' pronunciation problems. From morphology, teachers and students can learn and analyze the word formation process in order to get better perception of words being studied. For example, they can understand that words are composed of roots and affixes and hence can figure out the resulting meaning of words. From syntax, teachers and students can learn and understand the construction of words to become phrases, clauses, and sentences. For example, a grammar can allow movements of elements in the sentence, such as : you said what? Or what did you say? Hence, they will be able to construct correct utterances or sentences. Semantics contributes to a better comprehension of utterances or sentences.

In addition, we need to understand social factors that influence the student's success in learning or acquiring English. Student's learning occurs when he or she participates in family life and peer group interactions. We can observe that the more often people practice the language, the better they will be in using the language. When interactions occur in natural ways we can expect the students to acquire the second or foreign language. Language acquisition needs constant practice and the students must be encouraged to use the target language all the time so that they will be fluent and effective in using the language for communication.

Conversely, when people do not use a second language for a long time, they will get difficulties in expressing their ideas using the language, or at least they will feel awkward to use the language.

However, the success of English teaching depends to a large extent on the quality or competence of the teacher in running the English program. Some of the qualities that an English teacher needs to employ are the following: to establish a good rapport to the students by having good personality and communicating enthusiasm for the subject matter, to employ various techniques to teach new lessons in clear and interesting ways by relating language forms, functions and meaning to contexts relevant to the students' interest, and to employ various activities to develop the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Last but not least, the teacher is expected to be a good language model for the students.

However, the problems of English language teaching in Indonesia are not simple to overcome. In the first place, the class size in general is too big. There are thirty to forty students in one classroom. No matter what method of teaching is used, the result of the English teaching and learning will not be satisfactory. Language teaching in general and foreign language teaching in particular must be done in small classes in the sense that there should not be more than twelve students in one classroom. In addition, the time allotment must be added and the language class frequency must be more often. The reason is that English language teaching is basically teaching new skills. Therefore, we cannot avoid having a lot of time to practice everyday so that the students will not forget the lessons easily. When the number of students in a class is small, each student

will have sufficient opportunity to practice and use the language. Without adequate time for practice, it is practically impossible for the students to be able to use the foreign language fluently. In addition, the classroom setting must be arranged in such a way that social interactions can be achieved because everyone can see each other in a face to face fashion. The classroom seating arrangement can be in half circle or u form.

Conclusions and Suggestions

English language teaching in Indonesia has to be improved if we want to get better results. The government needs to provide more time for the students to learn the language. The number of students in one class must be reduced so that every student will have ample time to practice and use the language. The English teachers must also be given opportunities to upgrade themselves either by attending a higher level of education or joining an in-service training to improve their teaching competence. When the teachers have good competence, they will feel more confident to do their jobs. They can also motivate their students to learn English enthusiastically.

Despite the many teaching methods that are available for English teachers, it is necessary to select the ones suitable for our teaching purposes. The students' needs must become the focus of our attention and instruction. The success of our English teaching depends on the students' achievement in terms of the objectives already determined before the program starts. English teachers must be open minded and ready to continue learning and striving for better teaching results. All necessary information and knowledge must be utilized to make the English teaching successful. It is necessary for English teachers to realize that the students have different background knowledge and learning styles. Therefore, the teacher must provide different techniques to guide the students during the teaching learning process. Linguistics is a good source for English teachers to be used in their teaching career because it is a scientific study of language. Every language has a system and it can be explained by linguistic knowledge. English teachers must be able to select instructional materials such as books, journals, audio-video tape recorders and cassettes, self-access and computerized language instruction to facilitate language learning so that the students can achieve effective language learning (Richards, 2001:230)

We need to realize that language teaching methods might change from time to time just like fashions. But we can always judge whether a certain method is suitable for our purposes. It is important for us to be open-minded and ready to try new methods for the purpose of improving the quality of our English teaching. English language teaching needs a lot of knowledge and strategies. A good English teacher must be highly motivated to carry out his job. It will be an advantage when an English teacher enjoys teaching because he will be able to motivate his students to learn. He should establish rapport and develop students' motivation.

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