
SUGGESTIONS AND WAYS TO SEIZE THE ESL ADVANTAGE AND COMPENSATE FOR THE LACK OF READY COMMUNICATIVE SITUATIONS OUTSIDE THE EFL CLASSROOMS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article discusses some suggestion and ways to seize the English as a second language (ESL) advantages and compensate for the lack of ready communicative situations outside the English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms such as in Indonesia to maximize English language learning. This is particularly for lecturers or teachers who play a very important role in facilitating any opportunity for their students to use English in real communicative context in English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

Key words: *Communicative competence, EFL/ESL contexts, English language learning*

INTRODUCTION

Factors such as teachers, learners, teaching and learning methods, materials, and contexts, all of which cannot be separated from each other, contribute to the success of English language teaching (ELT) (Brown, 2007). Along with recent developments in ELT ideas and principles that emphasize on communicative language competence, the distinction between English as a foreign language (EFL) context and English as a second language (ESL) context needs to be carefully taken into account especially in regard to learners' exposure to English being learned outside their classrooms.

This essay briefly discusses the difference between the ESL and EFL contexts. It, then, discusses suggestions and ways to seize the ESL advantage and compensate for the lack of ready communicative situations outside the EFL classrooms. This essay argues that the suggestions for either in ESL or EFL context should closely link to current ideas and principles of ELT. Teachers, however, remains to play a greater role in facilitating English learning opportunities for learners to construct their language inputs as well as to produce language output to allow language acquisition to occur.

DISCUSSION

1. Differences between ESL and EFL Contexts

Although English has spread worldwide for various reasons, in various modes, and for various purposes (Alatis, 2005; Cristal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Harmer, 2001), it is still important for teachers to take into account the difference between ESL and EFL contexts particularly concerning learners' access to English outside their classroom (Brown, 2007, p.134-135). In countries such as Britain, US, Australia where English is the first language or countries such as Singapore and India where English is used daily by many literate people, learners of English have a great exposure to English. In contrast, in countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia, where English is mainly taught as a subject at schools and universities, learners of English have limited access of English outside their classrooms because they to some degree rarely find English used in their daily life. They may only be able to access English through media such as TV, films,

music, and internet. Therefore, it is important for teachers of English to carefully consider ways to provide English learning opportunities for their learners in these different contexts.

2. Seizing the ESL Advantage

In this regard, it is much beneficial to take into account Brown's (2007, p.135) suggestions both to seize the ESL advantage and to compensate for the lack of ready communicative situations outside the EFL classrooms because these suggestions inform current ELT ideas and principles. For the ESL context, Brown (2007, p.135) suggests that teachers should (a) give students homework that involves a specific speaking task with a person(s) outside the classroom; (b) encourage students to seek out opportunities for practice; (c) arrange a social mixer with native speakers; (d) encourage students to seek corrective feedback from others; (e) have students keep a log or diary of their extra class learning; (f) plan and carry out field trips; and (g) invite speakers into the classroom.

Brown's first four suggestions (a - d) can be argued as closely in line with two most influential concepts of humanism and experiential learning and interpretative view of education, in particular related to the principles of communicative language teaching, learner centred education, negotiated curricula and task based language teaching ((Nunan, 1999; Tudor, 2001). These four suggestions allow students to make sense of the world by using the language being learned (English) in which students construct the language knowledge and skills for themselves by making interaction with others through language tasks. In my experience as a student at Flinders University, the ESOL-8001 SLTL topic is an excellent example of how the first four Brown's suggestions can be incorporated into a single task, which is group presentation.

In this task, I was appointed as a member of a group of four diverse background students (one native speaker from Australia and three non-native speakers - one from Belgium, one from Mongolia, and I myself from Indonesia). In such a group presentation task, great opportunities had been created through a series of activities: having a pre meeting with the SLTL topic coordinator to discuss the *Workshop Activity 4.7 - Where do you stand?* for presentation; having several discussion sessions with group members in the process of preparing for the presentation, presenting the topic in front of the class followed by feedback from colleagues, having a post meeting with the topic coordinator to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of our group presentation, and finally writing a summary of reflection of our presentation. These activities have strong authenticity because they allow each group member (native and non-native speakers) including myself to use genuine English in communicating ideas through real discussions with the topic coordinator, peer group members, other colleagues in the class, and writing a summary.

The group presentation task designed in the ESOL-8001 SLTL topic has successfully fulfilled the principles of the task itself because through the task, we used the target language incorporating all language skills especially speaking skill with the primary focus on the meaning (Lee & Vanpatten, 1995; Nunan, 1999). This group presentation task has also fulfilled the six components of a task recommended by Nunan (1999) such as input data (which is linguistic data), activities and procedure (which is the presentation), goals (to extend the concept in Unit 4 – The practical basis of SLTL: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches), teacher role (as the guide), learner roles (who are actively involved in communicating and making decisions about the presentation), and setting (which is conducted in group both inside and outside the classroom) (Study Guide SLTL, p.21).

The group presentation incorporating main speaking activity is an excellent example to motivate students who are reluctant to speak due to cultural factors (Burns & Joyce, p.134) and a great opportunity to speak confidently within the group and among the colleagues both native and

non native speakers both within the process of preparing the presentation and during the presentation. In this case, the group presentation is also an excellent way in assisting international students to adapt the culture where English spoken and build confidence on how they can contribute their various roles to group performance (Norton, 2006, p.30). This allows language acquisition to happen especially for non-native students. Similarly, feedbacks were also obtained just after the group presentation from colleagues and from the topic coordinator at the post meeting. These provide more inputs not only on the presentation and its contents, but more specifically how the presenters communicate their thoughts orally using English that enable to internalise the inputs to become intakes (Lier, 1988, p.93).

Another Brown's (2007 suggestion such as having students keep a log or diary of their extra class learning was clearly evident in the Study Guide of the ESOL800-SLTL topic because the study guide provides a great opportunity for students taking the topic to understand and reflect major issues in the topic through reading all the related teaching materials provided and filling in the blank spaces throughout all the units in the topic and possibly giving comments on particular section(s) that need further exploration either raised in the classroom or via FLO to get further feedbacks from both the topic coordinator and colleagues.

The remaining Brown's (2007, p.135) suggestions to seize the ESL advantage such as planning and carrying out field trips and inviting speakers into the classroom, which are a great opportunity for students to get more language inputs and perform language outputs can even be very beneficial if applied in EFL context. In my experience as an EFL teacher at English Language Education Study Program of Khairun University in Indonesia, inviting foreigners with English, for example, are not new for me, although it is not always easy to do because of foreigners' availability and willingness. In my experience, in collaboration with students who got in touch with foreigners, I invited an NGO volunteer from India in 1993, a couple of tourists from Norway in 1995, an Australian research student in 1996 and a US research student in 1998) into my 'Speaking' class. I observed that students were eager to ask questions in English to these foreigners regardless of their appropriate and correct grammar and pronunciation. With this opportunity, while the students were exposed with the 'live' listening, they could also practice strategic competence as part of communicative competence such as interrupting speakers (foreigners) and asking for clarification (Harmer, 2001, p.230; Tudor, 2001. p.82). Thus, a range of communicative competence can to some extent be practiced before finally acquired.

This rare opportunity in EFL context is a great way to motivate students to use English meaningfully and to directly expose to authentic spoken language inputs. In this opportunity, with the permission from the foreigners, while speaking their voices were recorded for later teaching materials. For example, in 'English Phonology' course, the recorded voices of the foreigners could be played back to familiarise the students with how segmental phonemes (consonants and vowels) and prosodic features (stress and intonations) work in spoken English. Thus, while a survey still indicates that many students prefer to acquire native like fluency (Omi & Fukada, 2010 in Sybing, 2011, p.467), exposure of foreigners with different English dialects, as the case in my experience, make students become more aware of the varieties of English as an international language (Brown, 2007, p.136). Additionally, through direct expose to the foreigners the students also learn cultures from different language speakers and make them aware of cross cultural differences (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993).

3. Compensating for the lack of ready communicative situations outside the EFL classrooms

Brown (2007, p.134) also suggests a number of ways to compensate for the lack of ready communicative situation outside of the EFL classrooms that substantially convey some important messages for teachers to take into consideration. Brown's suggestions such as (a) using class time

for optimal authentic language input and interaction, (b) not wasting class time on work that can be done as homework, (c) providing regular motivation-stimulating activities, and (d) playing down the role of tests and emphasizing more intrinsic factors, and writing a journal or diary in English on their learning process show how classroom should be the major opportunity for students to learn and use English and these require greater efforts from EFL teachers.

These first four suggestions raise two key issues, first, authentic language inputs and interactions, and second, motivation, which are considered very crucial in communicative language teaching and learning in EFL context. In the classroom, these issues closely link to teachers' roles, teaching materials, and students' learning strategies. As the terms 'authentic language input and interaction' suggest, EFL teachers should promote language learning by exposing students to authentic language input through interactions and communication in the language being learned (English). In this regard, as the case in ESL context, collaborative tasks are considered as the best way to allow authentic language input and interactions in English while students are completing their tasks and in turn, language intakes may take place (Lier, 1988; Wright, 2010). Collaborative tasks allow students to work together, either in group or in pairs to use language. Working in group and pairs can minimize students' disruption especially in large classes which are typical of EFL setting.

Unlike in ESL setting where groups of different nationalities must use English during the discussions as discussed earlier, students working in group or pair in EFL context may be disrupted with the use of mother tongue. However, mother tongue is still allowed to use, but in minimal occasions (Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rogers, 2001). Therefore, teachers' role is very important to ensure the students to use English optimally. In my experience, at the very beginning of a class, I usually show four (4) simple rules printed in laminated A4 papers to the students: 'Use English only in the class', 'Don't be afraid of making mistakes', 'Raise your hand when Bahasa Indonesia is in need for clarification', and 'Sing an English song when you speak in mother tongue'. To me, these rules are considered as part of developing students' awareness of how important the classroom is as the primary place for them for optimal use of English during the language activities through tasks, before they fully need to be aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, learning preferences, and learning styles (Brown, 2007, p.261; Kinsella, 2002).

Tasks should take into account students' ages and teaching materials. To whatever age levels, tasks should, however, be varied to suit students' different 'intellectual development, attention span, sensory input, and affective factors' (Brown, 2007, p.100-108). Varied tasks eventually can increase students' motivation, which is part of implementing another Brown's (2007, p.134) suggestion: 'providing regular motivating-stimulating activities' to students. EFL teachers, therefore, need to be cautious with learning contents and materials that merely focus on grammar forms because this can be a demotivating factor for students (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009: 67). Similarly, the teachers should be cautious of frequently doing tests because low test scores can also be a demotivating factor for many students (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009, p.67; Tuswadi, 2008).

Using authentic teaching materials is strongly advised because such materials with some degrees of difficulties reflect the real language use and can be interesting as well as challenging for students to get authentic language inputs (Tudor, 2001, p.82). As authentic materials are hard in daily life in EFL context, and may only be available through media such TV, films, and internet, it is also strongly advised that especially teachers should be familiar with as part professional development and take the great advantage of such technological sources as a rich source of authentic materials for the maximum benefit of language teaching and learning (Edge & Garton, 2009; Wright, 2010)

Providing regular motivation-stimulating activities implies that a variety of language activities involving more than one sense are of important for EFL students in whatever age levels since students' motivation and interests to the language activities are on certain occasions often easy to lose. Similarly, language activities should incorporate learning strategies since training learning strategies integrated in the language tasks and activities are considered as strategic investment for students to become good language learners (Nunan, 1999, p.58). Students with good learning strategies usually have good intrinsic motivation that allows them for independent language learning (Chamot, 2001). Thus, other Brown's (2007, p.135) suggestions for EFL context such as helping students to see genuine uses for English in their own lives, providing plenty of extra-class learning opportunities, encouraging the use of learning strategies outside class, and forming a language club and schedule regular activities may work well. Thus, opportunities for students to acquire the language being learned (English) are very likely to occur because they commit themselves for their success in language learning (Davies & Pearse, 2000; Harmer, 1998)

CONCLUSION

Along with the current practices of teaching language communicatively, good English teachers in wherever context should provide great opportunities for their students to get language inputs and produce language outputs through interactions involving motivating collaborative language tasks and activities. Integrating learning strategies within such tasks and activities, and in turn, increase students' internal motivation may allow students to extent their language inputs as well as language output through independent language learning so that their language acquisitions are very likely to take place with the hope that successful language learning, which is characterised with the students ability to use English in real communication situations (Davies & Pearse, 2000, p.2) can be optimally achieved.

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