

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This is a literature study on how to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. Teaching, in general, can give one daily an unbelievable roller coaster ride from the depths of total frustration to the heights of incredible rewards. Teaching is a profession that is given little respect and lots of criticism. English language teaching and learning is an educational process. It requires great preparation and implementation to maintain the interaction between teacher and students. Apart from this, the teacher needs to be skillful in identifying the needs that should be fulfilled and the objectives which should be achieved. Teacher perspective needs to orient itself to the teaching and learning activities that cover selection on the instructional materials being in line with the instructional objectives, approaches, methods, techniques, and suitable tasks and exercises. The study indicates that good English teaching and learning is tied not only to the subject matter in hand, but also to the perspective of teaching that upholds the learner-oriented standpoint. It is strongly suggested that English language teaching and learning needs to do more on psycho-motoric domains, in the sense that it encourages students to do more practice in their learning.

Keywords: Quality, Teaching and Learning, Teacher Perspective

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching and learning, as part of educational process, constitutes an effort in which its preparation and implementation cover various kinds of phases. Even though the interaction between teacher and students is the greatest part of a teaching, English language teaching and learning activity is not merely related to it. Apart from identifying the needs that should be fulfilled and the objectives which should be achieved, the activity, too, covers selection on the instructional materials being in line with the instructional objectives, approaches, methods, techniques, and suitable tasks and exercises.

The target of the foreign language teaching and learning is achieving students' communicative competence. This means that after some periods of learning, students are able to express their real ideas in English. In addition, it is included in the main objective of instruction that must be achieved by the students who learn the language (the Department of Education and Culture, 2013).

In the last few years, communication among nations has grown rapidly, with the growing volume of commerce, international radio, and television program, project of technical assistance, and educational exchange. This becomes the evidence that nowadays communication in English in Indonesia has become an essential need to be mastered. Beside English is a means of international communication, it is also a means of communication among nations in ASEAN to talk about things such as technology, economy, politics, culture, literature, and so forth.

Realizing the above fact, the Department of Education and Culture, on behalf of the government, has seriously made an effort to improve students' mastery by improving the curriculum. The main objective now is that by the end of the program, students are expected to be able to communicate in English as a foreign language.

Based on the classroom experience, however, the expectation is still not satisfactory. There are problematic issues to be faced by classroom teachers, particularly those in remote areas, which are beyond their capability to surmount, such as limited number of hours, class size, the price of supplementary reading materials, the lack of teacher's mastery on various teaching techniques, the way how to correct the students' errors, and so forth. Apart from this, the social situation is particularly less conducive to learning English as English is not spoken

in society. It is true that lots of TV and internet programs are in English, but the subtitle makes the listener read it instead of listening to the dialogues. The implication of this is that students do not practice producing their English words sufficiently even though they have been learning English for years. Learning a foreign language thus requires the presence of teachers. English teachers, with no exception, need to master the accurate principles of English language teaching based on a particular approach to learning.

According to Sadtono (1983), it is the speaking skill that should be mastered first prior to the other three skills. He adds that the speaking skill is more difficult to master than the other language skills because it cannot be held alone in the process of learning. It needs a partner or partners to practice it. Yet, if students can master it well in the sense that he can converse sufficiently, it can help him master the other skills. Through speaking, students learn how to understand. This activity has sustained the foundation of mastering reading skill. CC Fries states that the teacher should use oral approach although the goal of their teaching is merely for reading.

The speaking skill also plays an important role in mastering writing skill. In this stance, Mary Finocchiaro confirms this opinion:

“...Would you stop to think for a moment? How much writing do you usually do in a day compared to the amount of speaking you do? Even as you write, don't you always think first of how you would say what you are putting down on paper?”

In other words, to the best of her knowledge, writing system originates long after spoken language exists. The spoken language is considered primary in that people learn to speak their native language several years before they learn to read and write it. Further, an English teacher is required not only to be able to speak English sufficiently, but also use the foreign language in teaching.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

English language teachers, like teacher in general, can be viewed from different perspectives. In the New English Dictionary and Thesaurus (published by Geddes and Grosset, Scotland, 1994), it is stated that ‘teacher’ is a person who teaches or instructs others, while ‘perspective’ means objectivity, prospect or the art of drawing so as to give an impression of relative distance and solidity. Thus, ‘teacher perspective’ can be defined as ‘prospect of giving/delivering instruction to others (students)’ or ‘prospect of teaching’. No teachers expect their students with bad outcomes; they always expect a very good one. Students’ success or failure relatively depends upon how well teachers teach. The conscientious teacher is concerned to teach well and want students to be successful in their learning. Therefore, being a teacher or an English teacher means to be a good person that is knowledgeable, passionate about what they teach. It is said that best teacher can change people’s lives. Best English teacher, however, can do nothing without being supported by best teaching materials and motivated students.

Therefore, teacher, student, and teaching materials are related to one another and of great importance in bringing good quality in English language teaching and learning. It is understandable that teacher perspective can also be viewed from student standpoint and teaching materials used in the teaching and learning activity. In Soekartawi’s ‘Meningkatkan Efektifitas Mengajar’ (2005), the profile of good teacher is as follows: (1) Expert in their field, (2) Skillful in delivering their subject, (3) Able to motivate students, (4) Able to play a role as a manager in the class, (5) Able to act as a leader, (6) Able to give counseling, (7) Able to give good learning environment in the class, (8) Accept the feedback from the students, (9) Want to use research result to improve their teaching, and (10) Use an instructional design in delivering their teaching.

In addition, Simmons (2010) suggests that good teachers come in many forms. They commonly possess such essential qualities as (1) they are passionate about what they teach; (2) they have skills that allow them to work successfully in teams, in classrooms with students, with parents and professional colleagues; (3) they have a sophisticated understanding of learning that enables them to apply creativity in a wide range of strategies necessary to ensure that all their students can learn; and (4) they are active learners working within a community of fellow learners.

From the above argument, it is stipulated that to be a good English teacher is not an easy task on account of the considerable challenges that lie ahead for those who wish to develop and implement a professional standardized framework. Therefore, people's argument as to complexity and interdependence of what teachers know, do, and provide for an excellent starting point as good teachers needs to be understandable.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT?

To the large extent, the success of the development of any educational institution and its effectiveness depends on its tenacity, sense of innovation, and level of quality training (Anonymous, 2007). This also very much depends on the contribution of people who work in it. Hence, the role of educational research and administrative personnel plays an important role in everyday running of education.

Nonetheless, at the root of the crisis, the educational institution lies in a paradox. In some cases, the teachers may not do their best in their teaching due to their low salary. For instance, they do not have enough time to prepare the teaching materials or other teaching preparations as they have to spend most of the time for other activities – for earning additional income, whereas they are frequently instructed to perform as an agent of development.

Drawing on the International Conference in Paris, France, on 19th – 21st of March, 2017, attended by a number of (English language) teachers of particular educational institutions, policy makers, and other interested international agencies, the above issues are responded. More specifically, the conference attempted to question 'What is the Teacher Perspective on: Quality of Education, Terms of Condition of Employment, the Rights and Freedom of Teachers in (Higher) Education, Institutional Autonomy and Accountability, Funding of Education and Research, Management and Governance of Education Institutions, the Role of Research, Distance Learning and New Technologies?'

Quality of Education

In relation to quality of education, the conference recognizes two things to assess the quality of education, namely (1) courses which are relevant to the students' need, and (2) courses that satisfy the needs of the labor market for skilled personnel. Thus, the key questions an English teacher needs to ask as to contributing to the quality of education are:

1. What role do teachers need to play in deciding quality policies and carrying out evaluations?
2. How can quality affect the links between teaching and research?
3. What professional development should be in place to maintain quality in teaching?
4. Does pressure on funding squeeze out the quality of education?

Terms of Condition of Employment

In terms of condition of teacher employment, the conference discusses three things, namely:

1. Collective bargaining arrangements (extending beyond terms and conditions and encompassing issues like equal opportunities or something).
2. 'Casualisation' of the workforce (part-time and fixed-term contracted teachers).
3. Equal opportunities and equal payment (sex discrimination, age discrimination, ethnic discrimination, and disabled people)

The Rights and Freedom of Teacher

Regarding the rights and freedom of teacher in (higher) education, the conference discusses two aspects: Firstly, the academic freedom of teachers engaged in research, and secondly, teacher rights as employees to have a say in determining the policies and priorities of their institutions.

Institutional Autonomy and Accountability

Educational institutions need autonomy and academic freedom not only in some abstract way, but in some ways teachers can do their job. English teachers can teach effectively and maintain their creativity only in an atmosphere of academic freedom.

Funding of Education and Research

English teachers are advised to do research. The main objective is to use the research results to enrich the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, the problem is on the limited fund for research. In some respect, the funding crisis is not only in research, but in education management as well.

Management and Governance of Education Institutions

There is great cooperation between university/school managers and the government in that the government allocates some fund for university/school to run the teaching-learning activities. Yet, there is also unavoidable tension and conflict – particularly over issues like salary, budget priorities, and the like, which may affect the quality of teachers in teaching in daily work.

The Role of Research

It has been previously discussed, educational research is of paramount importance in improving quality of teaching and thus improving quality of education. When an English teacher does research, he or she needs to maintain the balance in his or her time allocation, and hence there will be no negative impact on his or her daily teaching activities.

Distance Learning and New Technologies

Quality of education, in the teacher perspective, can be conducted through distance education due to the rapid growth of people that require education and the rapid growing of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Using ICT through distance learning to save money sounds attractive, particularly in the educational sector.

ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

There are three components that significantly contribute to the success of English language teaching and learning, which is the role of teacher, the quality of teaching materials, and the role of students. These three relevant components need to be put together in one 'basket' called learning environment.

Managing these components into teaching and learning activities, various techniques that depends upon the experience of the teacher can be employed.

The Role of Teachers

Teacher, with no exception of English teachers, is the essential element in good schools (Paul Brock in Simmons, 2000). The best (English) teacher potentially changes people's lives, for he or she can open students' eyes to what is possible and show them a way to achieve it.

He or she develops and applies his or her own style of teaching to achieve the teaching and learning output. Yet, the problematic issue is on those who have inadequate teaching experience (new teachers, for instance). They may face particular difficulties in conducting teaching as expected. Therefore, relevant in-service training for them, peer-group discussions, and so forth, needs to be intensely emphasized.

Inferring from Campbell (2002), English teachers should adopt Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences approach. Gardner believes that by establishing good learning environment, the skills and knowledge of learners can be significantly improved. Gardner argues that curriculum should be thematic and interdisciplinary.

Further, in the research of how to improve skills and knowledge of a certain subject, Gardner asks students to study things regarding:

1. Building and Moving Center (Kinesthetic Intelligence). In this place, he asks students to demonstrate comet's orbit around the sun.
2. Reading Center (Linguistic Intelligence). In this case, he asks students to read books on comets.
3. Math and Science Center (Logical/Mathematical Intelligence). He asks students to solve story problems by adding numbers for the lengths of comet's tails.
4. Working Together Center (Interpersonal Intelligence). Gardner, in this stage, asks students to work collaboratively at the computer, creating database and browsing in the internet about comets.
5. Personal Work Together (Intra-personal Intelligence). Gardner asks students to write poems about comets on a piece of paper cut out in the shapes of comets.
6. Art Centre (Spatial Intelligence). Gardner asks students to design/build comets with glue and glitter on graph paper.
7. Music Centre (Musical Intelligence). Gardner asks students to create a rap song about comets to incorporate some of the facts they have learned.

Results of Gardner's study show that the students develop increased responsibility, self-direction, independence, and academic achievement at the end of the course. The students also develop and apply new, cooperative learning skills.

Commenting on Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence, Malcolm Knowles, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, David Perkins, Art Costa, and Linda Tsantis (as stated in Campbell, 2002) argue that self-directed learning as demonstrated by Gardner can enhance intrinsic motivation as the students have frequent opportunities to develop independent projects. They also argue that stimulating students' enjoyment of learning and then transmitting information constitute tangible indicators of effective teaching. In addition, Perkins and Art Costa suggest the importance of thinking skills and 'mindware' of the human intellect in creating critical analysis, evaluation, synthesis and participatory decision making.

The Role of Students

Students can only do so much by themselves. The remainder depends on the environment (Dingilian, 2000). According to Dingilian (2000), Aze (1999), and Schmier (2003), students have varying sets of expectations from their teachers and school. This is because education starts at home, and by the time the student studies at school, they get patterns of discipline, to listen, and to follow directions. Thus, the issue is how to harmonize the learning environment at home and at schools.

Allan (2003) suggests that in order to have good learning environment, English language teaching should be conducted in such ways that encourage students to enjoy learning. Yet, in some cases, having only good learning environment is insufficient. Students need to "practice, practice, and practice" (Schmier, 2003). The students ought to meet high standard of quality of education, and work with their greatest effort to reach the highest goal.

Learning Materials

Learning materials ought to be updated regularly, attractive, designed based on things around the students and matched to the need of the marketplace. Besides, learning materials should be designed and prepared for the information age. Students not only learn from books and other printed materials, but also from electronic sources – radio, television and internet.

CONCLUSION

Teaching is an ‘art’. Being an ‘art’, teaching is conducted in different ways and styles. As a person who teaches or instructs others, a teacher evaluates his or her teaching through his or her own perspective. None of teachers, including English teachers, expect their teaching with bad results; they expect a very good one, even the best one. They want their students to attain excellent achievement. They open their students’ eyes to what is possible and show them a way to achieve it. Therefore, an English teacher ought to be a good person, knowledgeable, passionate about what they teach, and able to change people’s lives. To do this, English teachers need to be supported by best teaching materials and highly motivated students. In other words, teacher, student, and teaching materials are essential components in bringing good quality to English language teaching and learning.

Writer’s experience indicates that good English teaching and learning is not tied to subject matter in hand. Subject matter is merely a vehicle within a long-term effort to accomplish ‘something else’ that is more important and valuable. In other words, teaching in either student or teacher perspective should be learner-oriented. Drawing on Schmier (2003) in the article entitled “Random Thoughts: Ideas To Inspire And Support Teachers”, it is strongly suggested that English teachers do more ‘psychomotoric approach’ in teaching by, for instance, asking students to do more practice in their learning.

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