

OPTIMIZING TEACHING ENGLISH AS EFL IN NOVICE LEVEL THROUGH STUDENTS' OPTIMISM

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ABSTRACT

Mengoptimalkan pengajaran bahasa inggris dengan menanamkan rasa optimisme pada siswa mempunyai pengaruh sangat penting dalam belajar bahasa inggris terutama dalam tingkat dasar. Siswa akan mempunyai inisiatif, berani mengambil resiko dan akan lebih banyak terlibat dalam setiap kegiatan sehingga mereka dapat meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa serta mempunyai kemampuan akademik yang tinggi .

***Kata kunci:** Optimisme, Kemampuan Bahasa Inggris*

A. Introduction

English is a language with great reach and influence, it is taught all over the world under many different circumstances. Millions of people use this language. English is one of the international languages most widely used as a means of communication among nations in the world. English has become a global language, used in communication, technical, and scientific journal and in technology. Therefore, Indonesia students need to learn English. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject from novice school up to university level. Its status in this country is as an international language.

English as a international language (EIL) indicates the use of English in a non-English-speaking region. Study can occur either in the student's home country, as part of the normal school curriculum or otherwise, or, for the more privileged minority, in an Anglophone country which they visit as a sort of educational tourist, particularly immediately before or after graduating from novice.

Language teaching practice often assumes that most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English. Students whose native language is more similar to English tend to acquire English more easily than those whose native language is less similar to English (Chiswick & Miller, 1997; Dornyei & Skehan, 2003) as cited in Drew, Andal & Davidson, 2005). Indonesian people, particularly Indonesian students, who learn English, may face more difficulties than students from some countries, which their languages are closely related to English.

Due to the fact that English and Indonesian are very different in terms of orthography, pronunciation, morphology and syntax, so it is realized that learning English is not easy for Indonesian students. They often produce errors of using English as the result from the influence of their L1, such as mapping its grammatical patterns inappropriately onto the English pronouncing certain sounds incorrectly, or with difficulty, and confusing items of vocabulary.

The difficulties and problems faced by students in learning EIL can make the students feel hopeless, stress, and depression. They will think that learning English is too difficult for them. Therefore, the students may consider that they will not be able to master English and use it.

In the process of the students in learning English, there are some factors that influence the result. Optimism could be one them, because Perry, Hechter, Mence, & Weinberg (1993) and Peterson (2000) as cited in Ruthig, Perry & Hladkyj (2004), said that optimism, which is an individual – different variable, have been found to affect college students in making the transition to novice and beyond. The current longitudinal study examines optimism in terms of how it influences students' cumulative grade point average (GPA), and persistence in college over the course of an academic year (Ruthig, Perry, Hall & Hladkyj: 2004).

When we read some articles or journals about optimism, we can get some opinions that say implicitly or explicitly that optimism is one motivational factor for the students. Students who have optimism in learning are expected

to be able to keep trying to learn, and make good grades in their academic achievement. They consider the difficulties and problems that arise in learning EFL as a challenge for them. In other words, optimistic students tend to be not easy to give up compared with pessimistic students.

B. The Factors that can Optimize the Students and Teachers in Teaching and Learning English as EIL

a. Optimism

Optimism as one of affective variables in learning is believed as significant factor. Optimistic students are more likely to take the initiative, persist under adversity, take risk, be decisive, engage in quality problem – solving strategies, and be more assertive (Schulman, 1995) cited in Yates (2002). In addition, optimism is associated with action (Peterson & Seligman, 1984) cited in Yates (2002).

Peterson (2000) states that the main advantages of optimism may be found in increasing persistence and commitment during the phase of action toward a chosen goal, and improving the ability to tolerate uncontrollable suffering. Of course, there is no doubt about how important persistence and commitment in learning, which also has effect on academic achievement. In contrast, there is empirical evidence, which shows that optimism is not good if it is too unrealistic. Unrealistic optimism is the belief that nothing bad will happen because the person feels invincible to things such as accidents, diseases, etc.

b. Factors Affecting Learning

Based on a research conducted by the American Psychological Association (1997), there are 14 psychological principles that affect learner and learning process. These principles focus on psychological factors that are primarily internal to and under the control of the learner rather than conditioned habits or physiological factors. The principles are intended to deal holistically with learners in the context of real world learning situations. Thus, they are best understood as an organized set of principle; no principle should be viewed in

isolation. The principles are divided into cognitive and meta-cognitive motivational and affective, developmental and social, and individual difference factors influencing learners and learning. Those factors are:

1) Cognitive and Meta-Cognitive Factors

In this point, the success of the learner is based on the ability of the learner's thought and senses in acquiring knowledge and understanding. In cognitive and meta-cognitive factors it is explained that student's achievement is influenced mostly by the process of learning. The principles contained in this factor are :

a) Nature of the Learning Process

Learning in schools emphasizes the use of intentional processes that students can use to construct meaning from information, experiences, and their own thoughts and beliefs. Successful learners are active, goal-directed, self-regulating, and assume personal responsibility for contributing to their own learning.

b) Goals of the Learning Process

The successful learner, over time and with support and instructional guidance can create meaningful, coherent representation of knowledge.

c) Construction of Knowledge

The successful learner can link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways.

d) Strategic Thinking

The successful learner can create and use repertoire of thinking and reasoning strategies to achieve complex learning goals.

e) Thinking about Thinking

Higher order strategies for selecting and monitoring mental operations facilitate creative and critical thinking.

f) Context of Learning

Learning is influenced by environmental factors, including culture, technology, and instructional practices.

2) Motivational and Affective Factors

How learners achieve what they learned is greatly influenced by their motivation in learning and how they feel about the learning itself. In this point, the principles talks about the way motivation and emotion influence learning. Those principles are:

a) Motivational and Emotional Influence on Learning

What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner's motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual's emotional states, beliefs, interest and goals, and habits of thinking.

b) Intrinsic Motivation to Learn

The learner's creativity, higher order thinking, and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by task of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to personal interests, and providing for personal choice and control.

c) Effects of Motivation on Effort

Acquisition of complex knowledge and skills requires extended learner effort and guided practice. Without learners' motivation to learn, the willingness to exert this effort is unlikely without coercion.

3) Development and Social Factors

In the effort of achieving knowledge, the developmental state of the learner is quiet influential, so as the social influences to the learner. Therefore, they are crucial factors to the success of learner in learning. The factors are elaborated below:

a) Developmental Influences on Learning

As individual develop, there are different opportunities and constraints for learning. Learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account.

b) Social Influence on Learning

Learning is influenced by social interaction, interpersonal relations, and communication with others.

4) Individual Differences Factors

Another factor that equality important is the individual differences factors. This factor explains why learners have different achievement in learning. The principles bellow explain how individual differences influence learning achievement. The principles are:

a) Individual Differences in Learning

Learners have different strategies, approaches, and capabilities for learning that are a function of prior experience and heredity.

b) Learning and Diversity

Learning is most effective when differences in learner's linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account.

c) Standards and Assessment

Setting appropriately high and challenging standards and assessing the learner as well as learning progress including diagnostic, process, and outcome assessment are integral parts of the learning process.

Optimizing is reflected in some of these factors, e.g. goals and motivational factors, since optimizing concerns about better future outcome, and as motivational factor in learning.

5) Explanatory Style

Martin E.P. Seligman and his colleagues have approached optimism in terms of an individual's characteristic explanatory style: how he or she explains the causes of bad events (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995) cited in Peterson (2000). Explanatory style is the way people determine the outlook of his / her life based on past experiences. People who believe these past experiences were positive and that negative memories were out of their control (external factors) are said to have a positive explanatory style or are optimistic.

C. Conclusion

Optimal tendencies are formed during childhood (Nolen Heeksenia & Girus, 1995; Yates, 1998a) from the myriad of everyday experiences (Peterson & Bassio, 1991) and impact on children's health, motivation, and achievement (Seligman, 1990, 1995). Significant moderate correlations have been found between children's explanatory style and concurrent measures of general academic achievement, as assessed by the California Achievement Test (California Testing Bureau, 1982) (Nolen-Hocksema, Girus & Seligman, 1986). In a five year longitudinal study, a weak relationship was found between explanatory style and academic achievement measured six months later in grade 4 and grade 5 students (Nolen – Hoeksema, Girus & Seligman, 1992). Children with optimistic explanatory style were more successful than children with less optimistic explanatory style on the California Achievement Test (Nolen – Hoeksema, Girus & Seligman, 1995) cited in Yates (2002).

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