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Language Acquisition and Language Teaching Methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Context: A Literature Review Study

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Abstract

This article reports on a systematic review of language acquisition and language teaching methods in EFL context. The theory of Language Acquisition proposed by Krashen (1982) was reviewed and elaborated with other relevant literature such as language learning theory and language teaching methods in this study. Some insights regarding second/foreign language classroom practice, the role of teachers in EFL language classrooms, and language teaching methods were also reviewed to give snapshots about English teaching and learning practice in English as a foreign language context.

Keywords: EFL, Language Acquisition, Language Learning, Language Teaching

Introduction

This study is part of larger study investigating students' preferred activities in learning English in one of state Universities in Indonesia. In the efforts to identify students' preferred activities in language learning, some issues related to the topic are important to be presented in this literature review study. The issues are the theories about Second Language Acquisition and Language Learning and their role in teaching and learning English. The discussion of these theories underpins the success of language teaching and learning for non-English department students who are the data source of this thesis. In addition to that, language teaching methods which support the proposed language acquisition and learning theories are also discussed in this review as well as some factors that affect English language learning.

Language Acquisition

According to Krashen (1989) acquisition occurs when learners are acquiring a second language in an unconscious way. He further points out that the process of a second language acquisition is similar to the process used in first language acquisition. His theory is based on Chomsky's focus on how languages are produced in the human brain (Diaz, 2004). According to Chomsky (1959) as cited in Diaz (2004) human beings learn language not only through a process which depends on behavioral reinforcement, but also our minds which have an active language processor, which he called "Language Acquisition Device" (LAD) which produces rules through unconscious acquisition of languages. In addition to that Ericsson (1986) states that learners acquire language in "natural order" whether they are first, second, or foreign languages. This natural order works on all levels of learners both adults and children. The learner will acquire certain grammatical rules in the early stage and other structures in later stages. The language rules that learners acquire will occur in predictable order (Krashen, 1989).

There are some hypotheses for language acquisition to occur. First of all is input hypothesis. Krashen (1989) has proposed that someone is able to acquire a language only by understanding input. One way to make input understandable by learners is by using simple language. Using common vocabulary and shorter-simple

sentences is advisable. Another way as proposed by Hudson (cited in Krahen, 1989) is providing background information. The background information can be provided by using learner's first language in a way it is presented. Helpful background information can be in the form of pictures, familiar topics and verbal information.

The second hypothesis is affective filter hypothesis. In this hypothesis, Krashen (1989) argued that even though language learners are exposed to sufficient comprehensible input, they do not necessarily achieve a high level of proficiency in the second language. Krashen proposed a hypothesis called the affective filter hypothesis. This hypothesis explains how affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety can contribute success in second language acquisition. This is the mental and emotional barrier that learners may have when they acquire a second language. According to Lightbown and Spada, (1999) "affect" refers to needs, motives, attitudes, and emotional states that can help or distract students in learning second language.

If low motivation, high anxiety, and low self-esteem are brought by learners, such things will prevent comprehensible input reaching the language acquisition device. So, the notion of lowering anxiety and building up motivation and self-confidence is important to the teaching of English to enable the learners receives adequate -comprehensible input in order to be proficient in second language.

Language Learning

Unlike language acquisition, language learning according to Krashen (1989) is a conscious process of study which focuses on the pattern of language. A study of grammar, for example, is considered learning not acquisition. According to Gass (1990), language learners will deal with a grammar of a second or foreign language and develop that knowledge so it can be used in their utterances. This is to say that grammar knowledge that language learners posses is obtained through learning.

Krashen (1982) points out that language learning is playing role as monitor. In writing skill, the correction of grammar accuracy is based on the rules that we have learned. In his monitor hypothesis, Krashen further states that our mind functions as an editor which checks our sentence productions for accuracy of grammatical rules to make corrections. The ability to edit accuracy that our minds have is obtained through learning.

However, the implementation of learning should ensure the flow of communication runs well. In other words, the conscious learning must not interfere with communication. Krashen (1989) states that the role of teaching practice is aimed to promote students to be optimal monitor users. These users will be able to use monitor for grammar accuracy when it is appropriate and when it does not interfere with communication. Optimal monitor users use their learned competence as a supplement to their acquired competence.

Language Acquisition and Learning in Teaching English in EFL Context

Teaching English in Indonesia has the position as teaching English as a foreign language. Berns (1990) defines that foreign language learning is the learning of the target language which takes place in a country that does not serve the target language as a speech community. In other words, in a foreign language learning context, there are few opportunities for learners to have input outside the classroom because the target language learned is not used as the main device of communication among people.

This brings the implication that the comprehensible input which is proposed by Krashen (1982, 1989) is hardly ever found. So, the role of the classroom is very important as a place for students to receive language input. According to Andersen (1990), classroom activities must be able to ensure the access of language input for the students to acquire the second or foreign language. The activities which are carried out in the classroom can generate meaningful communicative interaction among the students.

English is a compulsory subject taught in junior and senior secondary schools as well as in tertiary levels of education in Indonesia. Teaching and learning activities mostly conducted in classroom are memorizing vocabulary, studying grammar, reading an English text which tends to focus on knowing the rule of English language instead of using English for communication (Sawir, 2005). In addition to this, English in tertiary education plays a role as “a library language” (Nababan, 1991) because most of the books and other scientific materials are printed in English language. Therefore, teaching English at this level emphasizes reading skill.

Given that situation, the notion of combining language acquisition and language learning into teaching practice in an EFL setting is a turning point to consider. The view that human beings acquire language not by learning grammar rules but by understanding the messages which are carried by the language (Krashen, 1989) will be fruitful theory for English teachers to provide the *comprehensible input*, the basic element in language acquisition in the classroom. In addition to that, the needs of understanding rules that govern and construct the language in order to achieve the accuracy in utterances is still in demand.

Second Language Acquisition Theory and Second Language Classroom Practice.

Living in a country where the second language is spoken is the best way to have comprehensible input which results in high proficiency in a second language. However, this statement is not applicable in the situation where the second language or the foreign language's input can only be obtained in the classroom.

So, the classroom is a main source for the students to get comprehensible input as a vital element in second language acquisition. As Krashen (1982) states that language teaching and language classroom will help when both of them are the main source of comprehensible input for foreign language students who can not have input outside the class.

In order to make use of classroom as comprehensible input source, there are some points to consider. Firstly, classroom should be equipped by learning aids that can help students obtain comprehensible input. The use of visual aids such as pictures in classroom teaching is helpful to meet the comprehension. Secondly, the teaching of vocabulary becomes important. As Krashen and Terrel (1983) stated that the more vocabulary will result in more comprehension which in turn can lead to more acquisition. Nunan (1991) points out that vocabulary can help students acquire language on condition that students have productive and receptive control of the new vocabulary. In other words, the new vocabulary will be acquired by the learners if they know its meaning both in context and out of context. Finally, the teachers should ensure that students understand the message which comes along with their utterances in the classroom. In talking to the students, the teachers should not focus

on using a particular structure of the language which may be potential to distract the communication.

Furthermore, the second language classroom can perform better to the students if it can provide input which is optimal for language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Then, the question will arise to what extent that second language classroom can provide the students with sufficient comprehensible input. In attempting to answer the question, I will discuss the role of teacher in putting comprehensible input as a crucial element in second language acquisition.

The Role of Teacher in Second Language Classrooms

If *acquisition* is the central of language teaching and *learning* is the element to support students to acquire a second language, so the purpose of teaching practice is to facilitate for the acquisition to occur. Then, the next points will be how students can acquire a second language and how they improve already had competence. Krashen (1982) comes up with the hypothesis that the language acquirers will understand input which contains $i + 1$, where i is current competence and 1 represents the next level, by focusing on the meaning not form of the message. This means that the acquirers will acquire language by getting the meaning first and structure later.

Once again, the existence of comprehensible inputs in language classroom are very important as well as the affective filter to the success of second language acquisition. Language classroom should play its role to provide sufficient comprehensible inputs for the students in relaxing atmosphere. As Krashen (1982) stated:

If acquisition is more central, and learning of less use to second language performance, and if comprehensible input and the filter are the essential causative variables for second language acquisition, the classroom should help only to the extent it supplies comprehensible input in an environment conducive to a low filter (p.33).

The role of the teacher is to provide input and help make it comprehensible in low anxiety situation which is for some extent; the input should also meet the requirements to be optimal. There are some characteristics for optimal input which goes with any activities or materials provided by teacher for language acquisition.

Firstly, the input must be comprehensible. The main role of second language teacher is to enable students get sufficient comprehensible input in the target language (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). The teacher can slow down and make clear articulation he or she produces to allow students get the meaning more easily. The teacher, then, uses the more frequent used vocabulary and avoids using plenty of idioms. Using shorter sentences are also preferable to ensure the comprehensibility of input (Krashen, 1982). Another task of the teacher in attempting to provide comprehensible input is by using what Krashen called as extra linguistic support in the form of real objects and pictures. The teacher can also make use of students' knowledge to generate comprehension by choosing a topic to discuss which is familiar with the students' world.

Secondly, the input must be interesting and relevant. The teachers' task at this point is not easy. In looking for interesting and relevant topic, the teacher should take students' goals, interests and, background into account. According to Meier (2000) one of the essential steps in learning is to get students interested and curious to what are going to learn. This can be done by presenting games in teaching and learning activities. In addition to that the teacher must choose classroom activities that facilitate students' interest by eliciting students preferred activities that may help them in acquiring a target language (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Next, the optimal input is not grammatically sequenced. The idea of teaching students with structure or rule of language will generate a problem in traditional foreign language learning (Krashen, 1982, 1989). If the teacher focuses in grammatical rule, the flow of communication will be distracted by teacher's concern on presenting a certain rule. The teachers will focus on grammatical sequence on their utterances instead of presenting comprehensible input by means of communicative activities which interest students to learn.

Then, structure or rule of language is presented in time order based on the syllabus. So, if one student misses one rule, he or she will feel left behind by the

others. This condition may result in confusion which in turn may distract the process of the acquisition.

Thus, the comprehensible input that teachers present in the classroom should provide the natural review in which grammar will not be presented in sequence. The teachers will not attempt that a certain topic on day-to-day basis consists of a particular rule. For instance, if teachers want to present the use of future expression, other tenses will also be used. This notion is based on the nature of communication that the utterances we produce are using various rule of language structure to meet the need of the communicating goals. According to Nattinger (1990) that the main goal of language teaching is to make students able to deal with the meaning and produce the target language in real communication not to teach them the rules of grammar.

Another task of the teachers to make input optimal is by creating the learning environment in the classroom relaxing and non-stressful. Language teaching methods and materials presented to the students must help students be able to acquire language rather than be a test or tool to reveal their weaknesses. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the teacher must be able to create an interesting and friendly classroom in ensuring the language acquisition to occur.

In explaining the roles of the teachers Richards and Lockhart (1994) come up with some points which are based on the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning theories. Some of the roles will be discussed in relation to English learning practice in the classroom.

First, teachers have role to decide what approaches and activities will be employed in the classroom. Second, teachers should be able to create environment which is conducive for students to learn and work both individually and cooperatively. Third, teachers should help students find their own ways of learning and work independently. Then, teachers should be able to deal with classroom management and organization in which they will decide classroom routines, rules, grouping arrangements and so forth. At last, teachers should encourage students' confidence and keep students' interest in learning.

Language Teaching Methods

If combination of acquisition and learning is the solution underpinning the teaching and learning of English in EFL context, the next concern will be language teaching methods that may fit to support both theories in practice. The consideration to choose the appropriate language teaching methods is based on the notion that language acquisition and language learning will take place in unconscious, non-stressful and natural language environment. Furthermore, the methods discussed have similar principal that in order to achieve communicative competence, the acquirer must be allowed to use the target language for real communication as well as they provide optimal inputs as key factor for second language acquisition.

So, the Natural Approach introduced by Krashen and Terrell (1983), Total Physical Response method (TPR) proposed by Asher (cited in Krashen, 1982) and Suggestopedia by Lozanov cited in Richards and Rogers, 2001). This consideration is not intending to ignore other methods which have given great contribution for the teaching and learning practice of second or foreign language.

The Natural Approach

This approach was originally based on the second language acquisition theory developed by Krashen (1982). The natural approach is designed to provide optimal input that is believed to be main factor for language acquisition to take place. There are some principles of the natural approach in attempting to provide optimal input for the students.

First, a teacher has a role to be source of comprehensible input. So, the teacher only uses a target language to be language instruction in the classroom. Students may respond by using both their first language and second language. Since the focus is on meaning instead of the form, the students' errors will not be corrected as long as the message containing in the input are comprehended. Second, homework is intended to provide formal grammar work in which error correction is utilized in checking homework. Third, the goal of this approach is meaning transfer that enables students to talk about ideas, perform tasks, and solve problems and so forth. The

activities that students involve may present the use of certain grammar but these are not the focus.

The classroom activities designed in the natural approach are designed to provide comprehensible input. The teachers are suggested to use some media to ensure that the input is comprehensible for the students. Therefore, the use of real objects, pictures, or students' previous knowledge is advisable. In order to get students' interest to ensure optimal input for them, Krashen and Terrell (1983) come up with what they called Affective Acquisition Activities. These activities use students' personal interest to be discussed in the classroom. The choice of such topic is aimed to encourage students to feel comfortable of being a member of a group and make the input interesting and relevant. The focus of classroom activities is not grammar presentation. The focus is on providing students with a large number of comprehensible inputs.

One of the features of natural approach is that anxiety that may exist in other methods does not happen in this approach. Teachers do not push students to talk in the beginning of program. They may produce a target language if they are ready. In promoting students activities outside the classroom, the teachers introduce tools for conversational management (Krashen, 1982). In the beginning of acquisition process, students are introduced to phrases and expressions that help them manage conversation outside the classroom as well as get the messages conveyed by the teacher's input.

The role of grammar in the natural approach is to enable students to be optimal monitor users (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). The students are hoped to be able to use grammatical knowledge to help them in the process of acquisition. The teaching of grammar should consider not distracting the flow of communication. In addition to that, only few rules of grammar need to be taught to students on the easiest and simplest rule-first basis.

Learning activities, in this case learning grammar, are given as homework which is assigned to students in order to focus on form. So, the teacher allows students to have time to use the monitor in writing and in prepared speech. The students' errors are not corrected in the classroom instead of as home work to practice their monitor on grammar accuracy.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

This method was developed by James Asher 1977 in Krashen (1982). This method uses teachers' command as the language input that require students to respond to the commands. In the beginning, the commands can be in the simple form such as: Sit down! Open the Window! Stand up! and so forth. Then, in the next level, the commands can be more complex as the students' progress.

Since the input is understood by students, the requirement for comprehensible input has been met by TPR. Asher as cited in Krashen (1982) states that TPR is an effective tool to make students focus on the input and keep them actively involved in the process of acquiring a target language.

The goal of TPR is to make activities arranged for comprehensible input interesting for the students. Although, it is not easy to keep the activities interesting if the whole activities are being done is only for exposing students with imperatives or listening to the teachers' command.

Each lesson of TPR may consist of a grammatical focus that may reduce students' interest. But the grammar focus is not the major issues in this approach and it is not presented in sequenced.

In terms of quantity, the TPR approach is full of activities which are designed to give students more comprehensible input. This approach also gives contribution to reduce students' anxiety. Students are not asked to produce a target language until they are ready to do so.

The position of learning grammar in this approach does not play significant role. It is believed that students will acquire the correct form of grammar during the class activities. The emphasis on learning comprehension to the teachers' utterances instead of language production reflects that the students will not use the unconscious learning of grammar to check their grammatical accuracy in their production.

Suggestopedia.

Suggestopedia is language teaching method which was originally introduced by Georgi Lozanov (Richards and Rogers, 2001). It is aimed to generate the conversational proficiency of the students in relatively very short time. This method is also used to reduce students' anxiety by providing relaxing learning environment

in which students can learn a target language naturally. The use of music is an extraordinary feature of this method. The music is believed to be medium to make the learning environment conducive. Grammar has less attention in this method. According to Freeman (1995), the activities used in this method include imitation, role play, and question and answer.

According to Rose (1985), in presenting suggestopedia method, there are some stages that must be followed. First, Presentation stage in which students are prepared to relax and feel that learning is fun. Second, Active Concert in which there is an active presentation of materials to be learnt. These activities are presented with the presence of classical music. Then, Passive Review in which the students are encouraged to listen to some Baroque music while the text is being read by the teacher. The use of Baroque music is to provide relaxing and comfortable feeling for the students to acquire the material. At last, Practice in which students are invited to review their learning by using some activities such as puzzles, games, role play, and so forth.

Suggestopedia activities are designed to provide comprehensible input for the students. The use of familiar topics and students' first language are the effort to make input presented is understood by students (Krashen, 1982). The dialogs used in suggestopedia consist of some practical values that are relevant to the students' need. In order to ensure the process of acquisition, every activities designed in this method are aimed to decrease students' anxiety and build students' confidence. In terms of learning grammar, the method tends to include a certain grammatical rule in the beginning of the course. However, since the emphasis is on communication, a certain structures of grammar are learned in accordance with the successful communication. Pronunciation and grammar are learned in each lesson but the learning of this language focus does not interfere with communication (Krashen, 1982).

Conclusion

This article reviewed some related literature about language acquisition theory which focused on Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). In the efforts to identify teaching and learning English in English as a foreign language context, some literature related to the topic are important to be presented in this article. The issues are the theories about Second Language Acquisition and

Language Learning and their role in teaching and learning English. The discussion of these theories underpins the success of language teaching and learning in EFL context. In addition to that, language teaching methods which support the proposed language acquisition and learning theories are also discussed in this review as well as some relevant literature that affect English language learning. This review presented insights for teachers and language learners in terms of understanding and knowledge regarding both theory and practical issue in language teaching and learning. For teachers, this would be useful information of using theory of language acquisition and language learning as well as its teaching methods that might work for their classrooms. For language learners, it would be a guidance for them in learning English to be more effective and successful.

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