

ACCELERATING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH INTEGRATED SKILLS

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Abstract

English is a compulsory subject in Indonesia. The paradigm in teaching English is started at a very young age. Teaching English for young learners in Indonesia is challenging because the teachers have to adopt and adapt English and Indonesian cultures through the curriculum and other instruments used in teaching. Besides teaching materials, the teachers also asked to foster the students' mastery in using English so that they can produce graduates who have good English competency. In line with the increasing demand of the graduates who are able to use English fluently, the policy makers are trying to improve better national curriculum in order that the school can apply it and keep it on the right track.

Key words: *competency, teaching instruments, curriculum*

Background

English has been taught as a compulsory subject in Indonesia. The students are forced to learn English as early as possible. They are fostering to master English based on the curriculum applied in their schools. The teachers or English instructors are also demanded to meet the challenges facing the global competition. They are urged to build their students' competencies especially in using English.

Recent days, there are many local schools applied what is called 'bilingual program' or even promoted 'dual degree' program. Starting from the pre-school to secondary schools' level. It also happens in Semarang, particularly since the development of international schools in this city is increasing in numbers. The policy makers are involved in giving the licence for international school to grow up rapidly. Compares to local school, the international schools have already had better human resources as the students are from high social status level.

There are some differences and similarities, but we can say that both types of schools have the same purpose that is to produce students who have good ability in using English. The difference is on the curriculum applied in the school. The international schools must have better curriculum as the teachers or instructors use English to teach the subjects. This condition made the local schools compete to provide better curriculum. One of examples is immersion programme. The teachers of non English subjects must teach the subject in English. The expectation from this program is high but the implementation is still needed to be improved because there are some local schools that do not have immersion programmes.

The immersion programme an example of teaching English for non English subjects. It demands qualified teachers who have good English proficiency to teach non English subject. It is also done since the English Language Teacher Education in Indonesia has reached its remarkable stage of development as a result of the issuance of three important legal documents:

- 1) The National System of Education Act No. 20/2003;
- 2) The government's Regulation No. 19/2005 on National Standards of Education; and
- 3) The Teachers and Lecturers Act No. 14/2005. The implication of the legal documents to the systems of education in general, and that of English language teacher education in particular are very significant.

In terms of the level of education required, for instance, there is a very drastic change. Teachers including teachers of English, at Kindergarten, Elementary Schools, and Secondary Schools have to possess an undergraduate degree (Stratus-1 in Indonesian System) in relevant subject areas. In addition, they have to fulfil the Standards of Teachers' Competencies which have recently been set up by the Board of National Standards of Education. In other words, using the terminologies of the legal documents, teachers at schools have to possess both (1) an academic qualification of undergraduate degree, and (2) teachers competencies the standard of which are set up by the Board of National Standards of Education. In reality, most of teachers at Kindergarten and Elementary Schools, and still many at the Junior High Schools do not have the required level of education. (Saukah, Ali: 2008).

The other side of this paradigm is the demand to produce high English proficiency students to win competition in global world. The students are also have difficulties as they are from many different family background and culture. Especially for Javanese students in Semarang, they are not accustomed to use English everyday as the vernacular is Javanese so mostly they have conversation using their own mother tongue.

How to improve the students ability in using English in their daily activity? Theoretically they have learned it in school, but practically the schools do not support with the right teaching and learning methods. It deals with the English proficiency level. What kind of English proficiency classes are we providing for our Junior Learners? Practice needs to offer a variety of genre text types and skills development as we prepare them to succeed in exams. Content needs to be cross curricular offer global awareness as we prepare them for the real world. (Mc Kay, Katherine: 2008).

Based on the explanation above, the writer writes a dissertation proposal entitled "Accelerating English Proficiency for Elementary Schools Students through Integrated Skills". The study needs to be conducted into research and should be able to apply into reality with the purpose to get better view in implementing better method for teaching English to young learners, especially for elementary school students.

Problem Statements

The writer tries to formulate the problems related to the background as follows:

- 1) What kinds of English Proficiency classes should we provide for the elementary school students?
- 2) What kind of integrated skills that can improve students' proficiency in English?
- 3) How to apply the integrated skills in teaching and learning process?

Objectives of the Study

The problem solving steps are needed to answer the problems with the objectives to:

- 1) Find out the kinds of English proficiency classes provided for the elementary school students.
- 2) Find out the kinds of integrated skills to improve students' proficiency in English.
- 3) Apply the integrated skills in teaching and learning process.

Methods of Investigation

This study is a discourse study. The approach used in this study is the genre approach used in teaching English skills for elementary schools students. The nature of this study is a descriptive one as the aim of the study is to provide the right model in teaching English through integrated skills that can foster the English proficiency.

This study needs two methods to conduct the study namely:

- 1) Method of data collection

This method is done to collect the data that are needed to answer the problems. This method can be done by doing:

- a. Literary Study

The writer tries to find the related literatures to support the study. The literature can be collected in the library and via internet connection. There are many relevant references needed to support the study.

- b. Observation

The writer tries to observe the object of the study. In this study, the objects of the study is the elementary schools, the teaching and learning methods applied in teaching English, and the skills taught in elementary schools.

- c. Interview

The writer tries to interview the English teachers or instructors to get the relevant information because they are involved in the teaching and learning process in classes.

- d. Documentation

The writer tries to put into document everything that she has got from the elementary schools especially for the methods used in teaching English, the literatures used in learning English, and the ways the teachers or instructors teach their students in classes.

2) Method of Data Analysis

After the writer got the data by doing data collection method, the writer will try to analyze the data based on the data analysis method as follows:

- a. Comparing the information or data related to the relevant literatures in order to come up with the idea about the subject discussed.
- b. Finding out the differences and similarities related to the subject matter to get the best solution to answer the problem statements.
- c. Synthesizing the information related to the subject matter to get possible solution to answer the problems.
- d. Scrutinizing the information in order to scrutinize the data to get possible answer to the problems.
- e. Providing the right model in teaching English for fostering English proficiency for elementary school students through integrated skills.

Scope of the Study

The study is about the teaching integrated skills for accelerating English proficiency for elementary school students with the limited issues related to:

1. The four English skills taught for elementary school students.
2. The types of skills are divided based on the type of teaching namely micro-skill or macro skill.
3. English proficiency for elementary school students' level.

Theoretical Framework

The fundamental idea offered in this study is to propose relevant information that supports the issues on the effort to provide the model in teaching English that can foster the students to improve their English mastery. The English skills that undergo the teaching English in elementary school's level are reading, writing, speaking and listening. The four English skills are taught since the students are in the first year to the sixth year of their academic study in elementary school. The ways teachers or instructors teach the students should be considered as they have different educational backgrounds that influence their ways in teaching.

In terms of the models of teacher education, there is going to be a very significant change as well. Until recently, there are two models: concurrent and consecutive. However, with the most recent educational policy of the government, there will be only one model allowed: consecutive. In

reality, since the existence of the teacher training colleges in Indonesia, the model has been concurrent, that is, students at the teacher training colleges or at the English Language Education Study Program of a university are enrolled as teacher candidates right from the first semester. The consecutive model has only been provided as an alternative for those graduating from non-teacher education programs who later decide to become teachers. (Saukah, Ali: 2008).

The two models of teacher are shaped their educational knowledge in performing their task as English teachers or instructors. They are trained in teaching English but somehow their models are not appropriate with the need. The need is the teachers' models should know how to improve their students' mastery in English because they are supposed to help their students to achieve the target. The students' target is graduated from their schools' level having good grades for each subjects taught when they were studying there. This is a common thing required by the environment as the school has a role to produce qualified human resources.

There will be time for students to do their exams and before they do the exams they have trained and taught with many exercises given to them. Practice needs to offer a variety of genre text types and skills development as the teachers prepare them to succeed in exams. Content needs to be cross curricular and offer global awareness as the teachers prepare them for the real world. The idea of integrated (or blended) skills has become increasingly popular in English Language Teaching (ELT). Integrating skills around one macro-skill (ex: reading) enables a teacher focus on micro-skill (ex: reading for detail) and help students learn skills and strategies which can benefit them in both academic achievement and real life communication. (MacKay, Katherine: 2008).

Teachers may say that elementary school students are categorized into young or junior learners. As junior learners, they offer ELT teachers a fresh set of challenges. They are no longer children but have been used to theme-based learning. They have the meta cognitive capacity but need to be guided in critical thinking and how to express their ideas and knowledge. Teachers are expected to feature a simple step-by-step methodology for developing skills through academic and real world topics that engage junior as they prepare them for academic success and to be confident and competent global citizens. (MacKay, Katherine: 2008).

English proficiency of students means the students' ability in using English. Each student has their own language competence as well as language performance. Chomsky characterises linguistic knowledge using the concepts of competence and performance. Competence is a person's implicit knowledge of the rules of a language that makes the production and understanding of an indefinitely large number of new utterances possible while performance is the actual use of language in real situations (1993: 8). He also proposes that competence, rather than performance is the primary object of linguistic inquiry.

Language competence and performance also make up the students' mastery. The students' mastery describes their acquisition in learning English. English is a compulsory subject in

Indonesia and the students are demanded to pass the English exams to prove that they have mastered the subject. Their mastery should cover their knowledge and it can be proven through the certificate. This requirement is made by the government because the government has a scheme to build better nations through education, one of them is through teaching English. Nowadays, there are many young learners who are fluent in using English. This condition reflects something that is English is not a difficult subject anymore.

Teaching English for young learners is started as early as possible. Children should be exposed to English environment as many as possible. What about adults? Children and adults who do acquire language successfully outside the classroom seem to share certain similarities in their learning experience. First of all they are usually exposed to language which they more or less understand even if they can't produce the same language spontaneously themselves. Secondly, they are motivated to learn the language in order to be able to communicate. And finally, they have opportunities to use the language they are learning, thus giving themselves chances to flex their linguistic muscles-and check their own progress and abilities. (1998: 24)

The English subject that the students learn cover four skills namely reading, listening, speaking and writing. All four English skills must be taught in English subject in schools. The teachers should know how to teach those four English skills because those skills are integrated as it cannot be separated if they want to improve their students' mastery. Why it should be taught integrated and not separated? It is because those four English skills are related one to another in order to get better result for the students.

One of English skill is reading. Reading is taught since pre-schoolers. But the way the teachers perform their task depend on the students' level. The pre-schoolers need to improve their English vocabulary by seeing pictures, watching films, and listening to songs. It might be that English can be a very difficult language to learn and one of the reasons for this is the size of its vocabulary as English has more words than other languages (2003: ix). In this level, the teachers should be creative enough so that their learners can follow the lesson and the result is appropriate to the need. They can improve vocabulary by doing simple reading. It can be done by asking the students to repeat what the teachers say or copying what the teachers show them. This activity can be done inside or outside the classroom.

There are many activities that we can do in teaching reading. With respect to reading skill, the aim of reading skill is to help the learner to develop the skill of reading English. The means of achieving this aim are many, but probably the most important is learner motivation. Reading is the mother tongue is such an enjoyable activity that it would seem highly desirable to recreate this enjoyment when the student starts to read in the foreign language. But the motivation to read in the mother tongue may often be different from the motivation to read in the foreign tongue. (2005 : xii)

Reading is useful for other purposes too; any exposure to English (provided students understand it more or less) is a good thing for language students. At the very least, some of the language sticks in their minds as part of the process of language acquisition, and, if the reading text is especially interesting and engaging, acquisition is likely to be even more successful. Reading text also provides good models for English writing. On the other hand, reading texts also provide opportunities to study language: vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and texts. Lastly, good reading texts can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, excite imaginative responses and be the springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons. (1998: 68)

English is a second language in Indonesia. In a second or foreign language, reading carries even greater potential importance than in the first language since it is often the only readily available exposure to the target language. A learner of another language will be able to retain some of the knowledge gained in a course of study by continuing to read in that language for many years after graduating from the course. (2000: 118)

The other skill is listening. In listening, there are many activities that can be performed by the teachers. The activity can be done by story-telling, listening to simple English songs and watching English movies. Young learners like listening to what their teachers say and copy them. The teachers need to repeat some important words to make the students familiar with the words. This activity can be done inside or outside the classroom. By asking the students to repeat some words the students will be accustomed to the words and in return their vocabulary can be improved.

One of the main reasons for getting students to listen to spoken English is to let them learn different varieties and accents-rather than just the voice of their teacher with its own idiosyncracies. The main method of exposing students to spoken English (after the teacher) is through the use of taped material which can exemplify a wide range of topics such as advertisements, news broadcasts, poetry reading, plays, etc. The other reason for teaching listening is because it helps students to acquire language subconsciously even if teachers do not draw attention to its special features. (1998: 98)

When people listen-whether they are listening to a lecture, a news broadcast, or a joke, or are engaging in a conversation-they are listening to a stretch of discourse. In fact listening is the most frequently used skill in everyday life. Both L1 and L2 models of the listening process (cf. Anderson and Lynch, 1988) acknowledge that listening has both top-down and bottom-up aspects. Top-down listening processes involve action of schematic knowledge and contextual knowledge. Schematic knowledge is generally taught of as two types of prior knowledge (Carrel and Eisterhold, 1983): (1) content schemata, ex. background information on the topic; and (2) formal schemata which consists of knowledge about how discourse is organized with the respect to different genres,

different topics, or different purposes, including relevant sociocultural knowledge. While contextual knowledge involves an understanding of the specific listening situation at hand. (2000: 102)

Another aspect is the bottom-up level of the listening process involves prior knowledge of the language system (ex. phonology, grammar, vocabulary). Knowledge of the phonological system allows the listener to segment the acoustic signals as sounds that form words, words and/or phrases that form clauses or utterances unified by intonation contours having some key prominent element. Knowledge of vocabulary allows the listener to recognize words within phrases, and knowledge of grammar allows for recognition of inflections on words as well as recognition of the phrases or clauses that function as parts of cohesive and coherent instances of text. (2000: 103)

Writing is also important. As one of four English skill, writing should be done in different ways. The teachers can ask the students to write words up to sentence, and sentence into paragraph. The students' level is important to put into consideration because writing is not as easy as reading. This english skill needs process in order to make the students able to produce their own writing. The process is different one to another depends on the students' level. The process is determined by the teacher in accordance with the topic. The process starts from the word level up to developing into a paragraph. For elementary students, the writing process starts from words into sentences. The teachers can ask the students to copy what the teachers wrote. Then, the teachers can ask the students to arrange the word into good order, or into a good sentence. This process needs more time compares to other skills.

The reasons for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style and most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right. Writing as a skill, by far the most important reason for teaching writing, of course, is that it is a basic language skill, just as important as speaking, listening and reading. Like many other aspects of English language teaching, the type of writing we get students to do will depend on their age, interests and level. (1998: 80)

Writing, when viewed as a language skill used for communication, has much in common with both reading and speaking. Writing is the production of the written word that results in a text but must be read and comprehended in order for communication to take place. The writer, in other words, communicates his/her ideas in the form of a written text from which a known or unknown reader will eventually extract the ideas and their meanings. (2000: 142)

In speaking, the students are asked to speak in English. It seems easy at first but actually some students have difficulty to speak in English. Why? Because students are different one to another and they need to build up their self confidence to perform this activity in front of their classmates. The students are asked to tell simple things like greeting, singing, or performing plays. If they are accustomed in doing those activities, in return they will have no longer difficulty compares

to when they had to perform for the first time. If the students can speak English everyday, it means that they will be familiar with it so that they can master English easily.

It is important to be clear about the kind of speaking. We are not going to look at controlled language practice where students say a lot of sentences using a particular piece of grammar or a particular function, for example. In other words, the students are using any and all the language at their command to perform some kind of oral task. The important thing is that there should be a task to complete and that the students should want to complete it. (1998: 87)

In some ways speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire since it requires command of both listening comprehension and speech production subskills in unpredictable, unplanned situations. On the other hand, speaking can be viewed as the easiest skill one can use body language, demonstration, repetition, and various other strategies to make oneself understood. (2000: 165)

During the teaching and learning process the teachers should know that those four English skills are integrated. They have to put the framework in their mind so that they can map the students' mind. The mapping can be done by giving the right method during the teaching and learning process so that the students can achieve the target. The target is that they can pass the exams that are done regularly depends on the students' level. Mind mapping is also important as the teachers are required to make their students improve their English proficiency. The English proficiency can be done through the text given by the students.

In teaching English, the genre that is used for teaching is also important. The genre plays important role in teaching English as they are expected to do teaching and learning process so that they can give better result for the students. We live in a world of words. When these words are put together to communicate a meaning, a piece of text is created. When we speak or write to communicate a message, we are constructing a text. When we read, listen to, or view a piece of text, we are interpreting its meaning. (1997: 1) The genre applies are different based on the text type. The text types related to the skills that are taught by the teachers. The genre determines the scaffolding that mould the skills. The English skills is taught based on the required topics.

The lesson plan is made based on the genre. This includes discourse study. Discourse is frequently studied from the perspective of register or genre. Discourse registers usually reflect the level of formality and informality of an instance of discourse or its degree of technical specificity versus general usage. A genre, on the other hand, is a culturally and linguistically distinct form of discourse such as narrative, exposition, procedural discourse and so on. According to Swales (1981, 1985, 1990) and Bhatia (1993), a genre is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic in which it regularly occurs. (2000: 6)

The topic also has its own role because it can give different objectives based on the need. Different topics given can be given for the students based on the students' level so that in the end they can improve their proficiency in English. The topics are written in the plan. Some teachers with experience seem to have an ability to think on their feet, which allows them to believe that they do not need to plan their lessons. For a teacher, a plan gives the lesson a framework, an overall shape. Of course, good teachers are flexible and respond creatively to what happens in the classroom, but they also need to have thought ahead, have a destination they want their students to reach, and know they are going to get there. Planning helps, then, because it allows teachers to think about where they're going and gives them time to have ideas for tomorrow's and next week's lessons. (1998: 121)

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