Learning and growing: an alternative strategy to teach English

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Abstract – One of the problems faced by ESL learners is not a linguistic one, but they are afraid to express what they know and feel, in English. They are afraid of making mistake and prefer keeping passively attitude to participating actively in learning activities. This paper is based on the classroom experience by experimenting with the method called Learning and Growing (L&G). The basic principle of this method is how to motivate the learners talking about themselves, or things close to them. The method enables them to know who they are, to accept themselves, and to feel their self-confidence. After practicing one topic, e.g. Who Am I, the learners are able to accept themselves and have an awareness that making mistake is normal in the learning process. As the result, they dare to share who they are without being afraid to make mistake linguistically. The other principle is how to make relax atmosphere of learning, ignoring some formal rules. A friendly relationship is built during the learning process both the learner-learner and the teacher-learner. The teacher's task is to choose the topics with double goals: language and psychology. What language skill will be achieved and what personal growth will be focused on are the vital concern of the teacher. These goals will be realized by making an appropriate lesson plan and preparation. Finally, the evaluation may be conducted, especially for language achievement. The main purpose of this evaluation would rather know if the goal has been achieved than to get grades.

Keywords: language skill, language acquisition, self-confidence, psychological impediment

1. Introduction

Most problems faced by ESL learners, especially adults, are not linguistic ones but rather psychological impediments. They are afraid to express what they know and feel, not only in English even in their own language. In the context of ESL, they are afraid of making mistake and prefer keeping passively attitude to participating actively in learning activities. They are less self-confident to speak English though they have enough linguistic knowledge and skill. Therefore, it is important to break such "ice" first in order to overcome the psychological difficulties faced by the learners. Learning, thus, take place simultaneously with a growing personality by improving self-confidence. Thus, the problem is how to find a teaching strategy enabling to overcome such psychological impediment.

The teaching strategy is called Learning and Growing (L&G). The basic principle of this strategy is how to motivate the learners talking about themselves, or things close to themselves. It will enable them to know who they are, to accept themselves, and to feel their self-confidence. After practicing one topic, the learners are able to grow their personality, such as accepting themselves or having an awareness that making mistake is normal in the learning process. As the result, they dare to share who they are without being afraid to make mistake linguistically. The other principle is how to make a relaxing atmosphere of learning, ignoring some formal rules. A friendly relationship is built during the learning process both the learner-learner and the teacher-learner.

The teacher's important task is, firstly, to choose the topics with double goals: language and psychology. What language skill will be achieved and what personal growth will be focused on are the vital concerns of the teacher. These goals will be realized by making an appropriate lesson plan and preparation. Finally, an evaluation may be conducted, especially for language achievement. The main purpose of this evaluation would rather know whether the goal has been achieved than to get grades.

There are two dimensions in ESL process: (i) acquisition which takes place unconsciously, mostly for children in a natural way, and (ii) learning which happens consciously at school for adults (Krashen, 2013). Acquisition and learning process would rather concern on "input" such as reading and listening than "output" like speaking and reading. In turn, the ESL learners, however, have to produce output (speaking and writing) in the communication context. For adult learners producing linguistic output is not sterile from psychological or mental factors since it is the way by which human being expresses his/her thinking and feeling in relation with the others. According to Systemic Functional theory, language has an ideational function to understand the world and relational function to build a relationship with others expressed through clauses (Halliday, 1994). Therefore, intrapersonal and interpersonal factors have an important role in language learning. Regarding with SLA, Krashen (2013) mentioned the existence of effective filter such anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence which give hindrance to language learning. Psychologically, language plays a salient role in interpersonal relations, language becomes central to the sense of self, and consequently, ESL learners tend to avoid making a fool of themselves. They have less self-confidence to speak English though they have enough linguistic knowledge and skill. Therefore, it is important to find a strategy to break such "ice" in order to overcome psychological impediment faced by the learners.
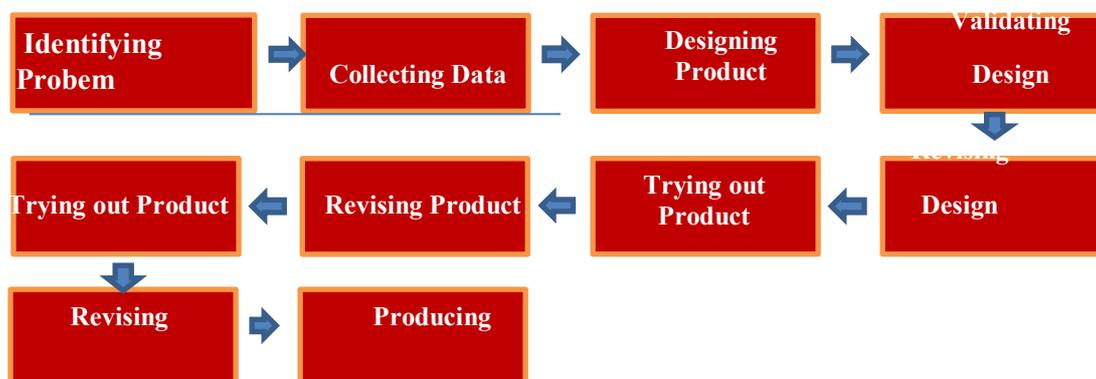
The importance of character education in educational praxis is expressed through research conducted by Jurges, Marvin, Phyllis, and Karen (Journal of Research on Character Education 2003) to 2000 students from 681 leading schools in California in the range from 1999 to 2002 with results: there was a positive correlation between the provision of character education and academic achievement. The more schools program character education the greater the academic achievement achieved by students. Dianne M. Dodds (2015) observed Montessory School students in New Jersey who designed their curriculum with a program of self-awareness and social awareness, found that students' negative behaviors declined along

with understanding values programmed. Curriculum 2013 which was designed based on character education was introduced by the Indonesian government to the level of primary and secondary education as a response to the criticism of education experts on the previous curriculum which was more oriented towards academic achievement, and did not contribute to character building of the nation's children. The main components of character are human values that are internalized in a person so that they become habits that are in accordance with the norms of society. Tillman and Hsu (2000) in Living Values: An Educational Program that identifies 11 universal values by UNESCO is recommended as a reference for the preparation of character education programs that have been implemented in various countries. These values are: peace, respect, love, responsibility, happiness, cooperation, honesty, humility, tolerance, simplicity, and unity.

Character education in general is implemented in an integrated way through all learning activities both intra-curricular and extra-curricular. Regarding English courses in vocational education, English is studied more on the purpose of pragmatic aspects, how to use language to communicate, not to know what language is. Thus, the English language learning program is very open to be integrated with other content such as character education or innovation strategies and other creative methods. An example that is commonly practiced in vocational education is the ESP (English for Specific Purpose) program which is designed based on learners' specific competency needs. With ESP, learners can develop linguistic competencies in the context of competency fields that are relevant to their profession. Character education that also develops self-confidence will support English language competence because, based on observations and interviews with students, most of them have difficulty expressing opinions or feelings in English not because of linguistic factors but psychological factors. Fear of being wrong and tend to be passive are common symptoms, especially for the realm of speaking. Character education with themes of personality development will help learners overcome these psychological obstacles. Krashen (2013) conveys the existence of two dimensions in the process of learning foreign languages, namely (i) acquisition that takes place naturally and unconsciously, especially in childhood, (ii) learning that occurs consciously and programmatically through schools or courses, especially for adult learners. Accounting Department students are adult English learners so they need planned learning models because the dominant learning process is learning. In line with Systemic Functional Language Theory, according to Halliday (1994), language has an ideational function to understand the world and build knowledge and relational functions to build relationships with others. Thus, psychological factors especially intrapersonal and interpersonal have an important role in language learning. The existence of affective filters such as anxiety, lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, will be obstacles to language learning. Thus language plays a decisive role in interpersonal relationships, language becomes central to the sense of self, so that learners tend to avoid feelings of feeling stupid (Krashen, 2013). Therefore the themes of self-development in character education will help learners of English be able to overcome their psychological obstacles.

2. Method

The first task is to choose topics with psychological content or relating to character building to improve some soft skills such as self-confidence, team building, collaborative skills, problem-solving, social solidarity, etc. After choosing topics, the teacher can develop a lesson plan with some learning steps. Generally, this strategy is developed with Research and Development (R & D) Method through some steps as mentioned by Sugiyono (2016) as follows.

3. Results and Discussion

Here is one topic which has been developed by applying L & G Strategy.

Theme: Who Am I
Linguistic Focus: human characteristic vocabulary; describing oneself
Psychological Focus: Accepting oneself; self-confidence
Procedure:

Step#1: The students are asked to write all about themselves they think as negative things (physically, mentally, characteristics, habit) in 15 minutes. For examples: I hate my fat body, I dislike my laziness, etc.

Step#2: The students are asked to write all about themselves they think as positive things, they feel proud of them, they like them in 15 minutes e.g. I like my blue eyes, I am proud of my musical talent, etc.

Step#3: Make a small group consisting of 4-5 persons. Each person gets a chance to tell what they have read.

Step#4: Give a question for discussion: - Which one is easier, finding positives or negatives?
- Give reasons.

Step#5: Explore the answers (most answers: negatives are easier) ask them what it means.

Guide to an awareness that if they have more negatives, it means they have NEGATIVE SELF-IMAGE. They consider themselves as being unable, bad, negative. As the result, they don't feel confident, afraid to express who they are. This is the source of problem: less self-confidence.

Step#6: Reframing: this step is aimed to know the cause of their less confidence based on their past experience (childhood).

Remember how your parent and teacher treated you when you were a child: did they often give you compliment? Did they underestimate to you? Did they ask you to

be perfect? How parent and teachers treated you in the past forming in your mind the image of yourself, and you will be what you think about yourself.

After knowing the causes of their less confidence, the students are convinced that they can choose to change their self-image. Firstly, accept as what you are now, and don't compare with the others. Focus on positives, other than negatives.

Step#7: Affirmation: the students are asked to draw something (things, animals, etc.) symbolizing who they are, and to tell about the picture in relation with their positive characteristics.

After conducting this lesson plan in some classes consisting of 100 students, the researcher gave questionnaire to the students with the result is

Statement	Very Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Less Agree (%)
I get benefit relating with my personality development.	45	52	3
I know more about myself so I am not afraid to make mistake	55	43	2
I feel my self confidence so I dare to speak.	64	31	4
I feel spirit in learning in the class	56	42	2
I can express my opinion and feeling in English.	46	53	1

4. Conclusion

It shows that the students have a positive attitude towards themselves. They can remove all negative feelings that block their ability to express themselves linguistically. They aren't afraid to make mistakes anymore, especially in speaking class. They feel secure and relax so the learning atmosphere may be enjoyable and joyful. Thus, this strategy can give a double benefit on how to learn English and grow personality take place simultaneously. It is recommended to implement this strategy as complementary combined with other methods.

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