ACHIEVE CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN ENGLISH LEARNING

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Abstract

Interaction is becoming more and more important in English learning. It is in relation with the need of the ability of the students to communicate in English. Success or failure in classroom language learning typically has something, if not absolutely everything, to do with the nature of interaction that takes place during lessons. The teacher interacted with the whole class by accepting feeling, praising or encouraging, accepting or using ideas of students, asking questions, lecturing, and giving directions. The teacher interacted with individual students by accepting feeling, praising or encouraging, accepting or using ideas of the student, asking questions, lecturing, giving directions, reminding noisy students, and helping the student's work. The student interacted with the teacher by giving response to the teacher's questions, and giving initiation. The students' silence often happened when they were asked by the teacher. The student did not directly answer or respond to the teacher's questions. The interaction among the students happened most of the time. In relation to the English lesson, the students interacted with their friends by talking about the activity asked by the teacher, discussing the teacher's questions, and asking about difficult words or expressions. The results of this research were in the form of description and interpretation of the meaning of interaction. It enriched the knowledge in English Education Studies. It also gave better understanding for the students, teacher, other language learners and the researcher herself. For teachers, it would be useful as one of the references in applying the teaching method in class to get maximum result in English interaction in classroom. For students, it would be used as a reflection to make a better improvement in their participation in class and to interact more meaningfully. Interaction was not just the action of the language learners. It was an active process. There were willingness, awareness, intention, emotion, creativity, and feeling of relax in it. In the classroom, both the teacher and the students should have the willingness to participate in the interaction.

Keywords: English Teaching, Classroom Interaction

Background

The language learners in the classroom are the teachers and the students. The teachers' method of teaching is influenced by their experiences in language learning. Thestudents' experiences in language learning also influence the learning process in the classroom. This study focuses on the languagelearners' interaction experiences. The learners here are teachers and students. It identifies the students' and the teachers'notion ofthe meaning of interaction in English learning, how they have the interaction, interpret it, and

actualize themselves through interaction. It also identifies how classroom interaction develops the participants' personal development in English learning.

According to Webster's dictionary, interaction has two meanings: intermediate action and 'action on each other; reciprocal action or effect'

A successful language learner can interact with others meaningfully. S/he is able to understand the other's speaking. S/he also can convey her/his own ideas. S/he also can respond to the other's speech. Language learning is not the result of transmitting facts about language or from a series of memorization practices. It is the result of opportunities for meaningful interaction with others in the target language (Walqui, 2000).

Interaction is the essence of communication. Learning to interact in English is learning to communicate. Interaction becomes an important aspect of language learning because it is what people do in their daily lives. They may talk, ask questions, interrupt, or challenge each other. There is an intention to communicate verbally as part of the interaction. Inthe classroom, both the teacher and the students should have the willingness to participate in the interaction.

In Vocational schools, English is one of the adaptive subjects. The goal of the English subject is to provide the students the English communication skills in the communication material context needed for their vocational program, both orally and written. One of the student competencies that must be mastered by students in Vocational School is communication skills. It is their preparation to be able to work effectively and efficiently. It also prepares for further education level based on vocational programs (Vocational School Curriculum, 2004). English subject provides the students' communication ability in their life as needed in globalization era and provides the students to develop communication ability to a higher level. Vocational Schools graduates, who are prepared for employment, need this ability. The lack of it will delay them in various workplace competitions.

Language learning is a process that involves both an individual and context as the main elements. An individual is a learner her/himself. The context is the events and community where the language learner is struggling to achieve communicative goals through the means of the target language. Learners' experience is another aspect that also plays an important role in their language learning.

Based on the Vocational School Curriculum in 1994,the goal of language learning is the learners' ability to communicate using the target language (English). The essence of communication is meaningful interaction. In interaction, a learner understands others' speaking, expresses his/her own ideas or opinion, and responds to others' speaking by talking, challenging, interrupting, or querying. A learner also has the intention to collaborate verbally.

The understanding of the meaning of interaction may vary from one language learner to another. This factor affects the way students express themselves in interactions.It is a need to do a research in describing and interpreting the meaning of interaction.Descriptions and interpretations will explain the actual interaction in its entirety with the underlying factors. An understanding of the meaning of interaction is the basis for real interactions that occur in the classroom.

Classroom interaction needs the participation of both the teacher and the students. The teacher's role is most important in designing tasks and monitoring the process of doing it. Whether by whole class discussion or small groups, teacher can do much to create an interactive classroom. Students need to think, speak, and be listened to as they participate in the classroom. Students will not get enough practice just by talking to the instructor, and

very little by just listening to the instructor. They need to practice with other students in theclassroom. They develop competency and become critical thinkers in classroom that provides opportunities for intensive, structured interaction among students (Bishop, 2000).

Interaction involves both social and personal input, and, forms the basis of the vast majority of everyday talking done by natives. Interaction involves the emotions; creativity; agreement; disagreement; people waiting patiently to get in a word; sighing, nodding, gesticulating, and so on. Interaction is not waiting to be asked a question (Counihan, 1998).

Interaction is not limited in the form of verbal response. A non-verbal interaction may also happen. Another possibility is the combination between verbal and non-verbal interaction. As the response to the teacher, students may answer by saying words expressing their idea, agreement or disagreement. It can also be in the form of written. Students may also give response by nodding, eye-contact, facial expressions, gesturing, etc. Students can also give response by gesturing followed by saying some expression (Willson, 1999).

Method

This research focuses on one specific real phenomenon, classroom interaction. It tried to understand the participants and help their problems. It used the qualitative research approach (Holliday, 2002: 6). This approach was used because it was a suitable approach to researching behavior. This is in accordance with this study which will observe the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. It would go deep to understand their belief, why they did that and helped their problems.

Nature of Data

In qualitative research, what happens in a particular social setting is the data. It can be obtained in a certain place or among a group of people. There are two broad categories of data. The first category is what the researcher describes: description of behavior, description of event, description of institution, description of appearance, and description of research event.The second category is what participants say, write, or have about them. It includes account, talk, behavior in setting, and document (Holliday, 2002: 69-72).

Holliday (2002) regards interviews as the main data. The observation notes (field notes) are another type of data. In the observation notes, the description of behavior, event, institution, appearance, account, talk, behavior in setting, and document are expected to enrich the data source for qualitative research.

There could be several ways of interviewing people, but in qualitative research interviews can be conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or by focus group interviews with unstructured and open ended questions (Creswell, 2003). This gives more freedom for research subjects to express their feelings, thoughts, perspectives, hopes, despair, failures, successes, and tell their stories.

Data Sources

The researcher came into the classroom to observe the class activity. How the teacher and the students (as the participants) interacted in the English class was observed. The field note and audio-video recording were used. The observation was written in the descriptive and narrative forms of report.

Interviews were done before and after the observation. The interviews were recorded. The field note was also used to make notes for the important points. The field note and recorded interviews were very important in transcribing the data. The interview done before observation was used to get the teacher's and student's understanding, believe,

opinion, and experience. The open-ended interviews done after the observation would be related to what they did in the English class, what and how they communicated each other, and why they did or acted like that.

The observations in classroom would observe the interaction between the teacher and the students in the classroom. By this observation, the researcher would know whether the students and the teacher did what they have said in the interview done before the observation. The observation was also recorded. The researcher also made field note.

Result and discussion

The condition of the English class was quite conducive. The students had good attitude to the teacher. They paid attention to the teacher when the teacher explained the material. They did the activity asked by the teacher. They also did the activity by practicing dialogue.

The students practiced the expression asked by the teacher, even when the teacher didn't ask them. They participated in the class discussion. It might be influenced by the use of the media (such as, computer program and textbook) that was quite interesting for the students. It might also because the number of the students that was not too many in class. They were only 20 students in one meeting. There were enough time and attention given by the teacher to all students.

The use of English for communication in classroom was very rarely. The teacher and the students never spoke in English. They spoke mostly in Indonesian. It was only greetings that were always spoken in English.

In explaining the material/topic, giving instruction, and asking questions, the teachers used Indonesian more. They were very rarely using English. When they used English expression, they always translated it. This condition reduced the students' chance to become usual in listening English expression. In one occasion, the teacher tried to discuss a dialogue and a picture using English without translating it. Actually, the students could understand it. They could answer the teacher's questions using short English expressions. When the students were given chance to practice, they were good. The students' participation was determined by the class atmosphere that was set up by the teacher.

 In relation to the teacher's understanding about interaction, the teacher understood that in learning English, interaction was very important

To be able to interact well, teachers and students who were active were needed. The teacherswere active in practicing English in classroom and giving interactive activity in class. The students were active in practicing their English ability, by asking questions or expressing their idea/opinion. Both the teachers and the students were important actors to make an interactive English class.

The students never showed their own idea in the classroom. They were obedient to the teacher. It seemed that they didn't have any other literature. They only relied on the teacher. The communication between the student(s) and the teacher was limited on asking about difficult English words. Asking about class activity instruction or material was not found. If the students asked questions to the teacher, they did it in Indonesian. And, the teacher also answered it in Indonesian, not in English. They learned English, but they didn't learn to use/communicate in English.

A technique that teachers can do to make students more active is to call students' names one by one in conducting class activities or practicing dialogue. The volunteer students were rarely found. If the teachers pointed to one student to do an activity, he did it. But, if the teacher asks for volunteers to come forward, the students don't respond, they just stay silent. When asking the students, the teacher usually gave more chance to the

students who had understood the material first. The students were regarded as the model for others.

The communication that happened among the students was about asking difficult English expressions and practicing dialogue/activity. When the students had difficulty, they asked their friends first before they asked the teacher. The students' book was only the textbook from school. When they had difficulty in understanding it, they would asktheir friends or teacher. They didn't have other books/dictionary to learn. The material in class was very limited from the book. There was no development outside of it.

The teacher has an important role in the success of English interaction. The atmosphere and processes in the classroom are usually influenced by the teacher's role in it. Most of the activities in the classroom are determined by the teacher.The teacher should be more often speak in English, so that the students become more usual. The teacher's role is as a mediator. S/he explains the topic and practices more. The teacher knows the knowledge, while the students don't. So, the teacher is the mediator.

Findings

This research was aimed to describe the meaning of interaction. From the discussion and interpretation of the results on the previous part, the findings of this research were presented as follows.

Both the teacher and the students understood that interaction was important in English learning. They also knew that they had to practice the language for communication. But, the understanding wasn't followed by their action in class. The teacher didn't give much interactive activity in class. S/he didn't actively practice English in classroom. S/he felt that if s/he always used English in class all the time, the students would know nothing. The students weren't active in practicing their English by asking questions or expressing their idea or opinion. But, actually, they tried to translate the difficult words/expression using their dictionary.

When following the English classes, in fact students understand the lesson. When they are asked to participate in class activities, especially writing activities, they do well if they are asked to write answers in their notebooks or on the blackboard. They practiced the dialogues asked by the teacher. But, they avoided interacting with the teacher. When teachers ask questions to be answered orally, they stay silent. They never expressed their own ideas or opinion. Reciprocal communication between the teacher and thestudents was not found. Feeling ashamed, not having self-confidence, feeling afraid of making mistakes, feeling lack of vocabulary, and because of the condition that the teacher and the other students never spoke English were some factors from the students. Some factors that may come from the teacher are the teacher does not provide activities that can lead students to speak, the teacher does not regulate the classroom situation that made the students feel comfortable to speak, and the teacher didn't believe to the students' competence.

There was a tendency for the learners to interact with the teacher but less enthusiasm when it comes to interacting with each other. Asking or answering the teacher's questions is preferred by some students rather than discussing with their friends.They have less confidence to talk with friends who also has less proficient like them.

The use of media, like computer programs and various textbooks, increased the students' motivation. The students were more interested to join the class activity. It didn't mean that it could increase the interaction between the teacher and the students. But, the media made the students more focused on the lesson and practiced it as well.

English was rarely used for communication in the classroom. The teacher and the students never spoke in English. The learning process mostly conducted in Indonesian. If the teacher used English expression, s/he always translated it. The communication among the students was also in Indonesian. When the students asked the teacher, like asking about the difficult words/expressions, unclear explanation, unclear instruction, or unclear writing, they used Indonesian. The English used by students was very limited when they practice the dialogues instructed by the teacher.

In making the students more active in joining the class activity, first the teacher gave time for volunteer student(s). If there was no volunteer student, the teacher pointed to or called certain student(s). The teacher gave some extra point or score for the student who wasactive in class. The score was one motivation for the students. They competed to get the best score. Another motivation that could make them active in class activity came from the students themselves. It was related to their intention, awareness, and willingness to learn.

The teacher interacted with the student individually in the following situation. The teacher greeted the students individually after s/he greeted them classically. S/he checked the students' attendance by calling their name one by one. The teacher appreciates the students when they make a progress. But, it happened rarely. In the class discussion, the teacher accepted the ideas/answers from the student(s) whether it was correct or not. In a discussion, the teacher asks several questions which will be answered individually by the students.When there was a question about unclear writing or instruction, the teacher answered it directly.

Most directions given by the teacher were in Indonesian. It happened when the teacher asked the student(s) to answer questions, read a dialogue, write the answers on the board, read the answers of an activity, repeat the teacher's explanation about some important points related to the topic, and give examples of an activity. Not only that, when the teacher asked to take books from the library, distribute books and dictionaries to all students in the class, and clean the blackboard, the instructions used were also in Indonesian.When some students were noisy in class, the teacher came closer to them and reminded them to be silent, pay attention to the lesson, or copy the material written on the board to their notebook. The teacher also walked around the class while the students did the activity. He corrected student assignments, helped them, alerted some noisy students to join the activity, and finished their assignments. The teacher always writes on the blackboard the important points of a particular topic. It is intended that students write down the points. The teacher collected and checked the students' notebook regularly.

As a group, the interaction between teacher and students is in the following conditions.In the beginning and the closing of the class, the teacher greeted thestudents classically. It was delivered in English and the students responded in English as well.Praises or encouragement was given to the students when they got progress in their study or they were well motivated in participating in class activity. The teacher combines English and Indonesian expressions.The teacher made a class discussion in answering an activity. All students were asked to join in that activity. Different ideas or opinion were accepted. The correct answers were discussed later.

The questions that were asked to the students classically were divided into two categories: questions related and unrelated to the topic discussed. The questions related to the topic were related to asking the students' readiness to study, the meaning of certain terms, the clarity of the teacher's explanation, and whether there was a question from the

students. The question unrelated to the topic was about asking the students' attendance in class.

The teacher presented or explained the material classically. The explanation is in Indonesian. This is also conducted when the material about dialogue or pictures.The directions related to the topic or material discussed were asking the students to write or copy the material written by the teacher, open the textbook page…, do activity…, read and learn activity…, and answer the questions individually, and collect it after class. A directive that does not correlate with the theme was asking students to turn on the monitor and paying attention to the teacher.The student(s) interacted with the teacher in the following situation. When the teacher asked the students some questions related or unrelated to the topic discussed, the students answered it using simple and short English expressions. If the students didn't know the English expression, they used Indonesian. They gave good response to the teacher's questions. Gestures and action were another form of the students' responses to the teacher's questions or directions. It was like nodding and doing what was asked by the teacher. In class, not allstudents gave such a response, especially the students who sat at the back raw. They were noisy, talked to their friends, and sometimes moved around.

The students initiated some following interactions to the teacher. They asked unclear writing, instruction of an activity, difficult words or expressions, and answered the activity voluntary. They also greeted the teacher. The initiations were mostly expressed in Indonesian.

The students' silence happened when the students were asked by the teacher. The students didn't answer the teacher's questions spontaneously. When the teacher pointed or called them individually, they could do it well. They didn't have self confidence to answer the teacher's questions. They were afraid of making mistakes. Not knowing the meaning of the English words or expressions was also another factor to keep silent.

The students interacted with their friends most of the time. But, mostly, it was not related to the English topic discussed. They talked in Indonesian. They talked about the activity asked by the teacher, discussed the teacher's questions, and asked about difficult words or expressions.

There were three other themes outside those themes above that happened in the interaction between the teacher and the students. Those were students do/talk something unrelated to the topic, students' gestures (including the students' act as the response to the teacher's act/talk), and teacher's act to help the class goes smoothly.

The students did/talked something unrelated to the topic happened both in the teacher-student and student-student interaction. They played or chatted with their friends in the middle of an activity.

In some cases, the students gave response to the teacher's act/talk by gestures or act. The gesturers were nodding, listening, expressing emotions (like happy, confused, or interested), and paying attention. The acts were doing the teacher's instructions and moving from one seat to another in the middle of lesson.

The teacher's acts to help the class goes smoothly were found almost in every observation. The teacher always reminded the noisy students and asked them to join in the class activity. S/he checked the students' work, notes, and notebooks. S/he gave motivation to the students. s/he also gave some clues or stimulation that could help the students to get the correct answers.

Criticizing or justifying authority category did not happen in the observation. The emergence themes were the students did/talked something unrelated to the topic, the students gave response to the teacher's act/talk by gestures or act, and the teachers acted some actions to help the class goes smoothly.

Students interact with teachers in the following situations. In the classroom the teacher gives a number of questions to students related or not related to the learning topic that has been studied, students respond to the teacher's questions using simple and short english expressions. If students do not know how to use english, they can use Indonesian. They respond very well to the teacher's questions. Gestures and actions are other forms of student responses to teacher questions or directions. It's like nodding, shaking their heads at questions they don't understand and doing what the teacher asks them to do. Unfortunately in class, not all students respond as expected, especially students who are ignorant and choose to sit at the back. The student is noisy talking with his friends, and sometimes changing seats.

The students initiate the following interactions with the teacher. For example, they ask for unclear writing, give instructions for an activity, ask questions about difficult words or expressions, and answer the activity voluntarily. They greet the teacher, although most of them expressed in Indonesian.

When the teacher asked the students, there was silence. Students do not answer the teacher's questions spontaneously. But when the teacher chooses one of them at random, they can do well. Turns out they just didn't have the confidence to answer the teacher's questions. They are afraid of making mistakes. feel confused by the English expression conveyed by the teacher in other words not knowing the meaning of the expression.

This resulted in students interacting more with their friends. However, most of them are not related to the topic of English being discussed. They speak Indonesian. They talk about the activities asked by the teacher, discuss the teacher's questions, and ask about difficult words or phrases.

There are three other themes beyond the themes above that occur in the interactions between teachers and students. That is, students do/talk about something that is not related to the topic, student body movements (including student actions in response to the teacher's actions/talk), and teacher actions to help the class run smoothly.

Students do/talk about something that is not related to the topic, both in teacher-student and student-student interactions. They play or chat with their friends in the middle of the activity.

In some cases, students respond to the teacher's actions/talk with gestures or actions. Gestures are nodding, listening, expressing emotions (such as happy, confused, or interested), and paying attention. The act is to carry out the teacher's instructions and move from one seat to another in the middle of the lesson.

The teacher's actions to help make the class run smoothly are found in almost every observation. The teacher always reminds noisy students and asks them to join in class activities. He checked student work, notes, and notebooks. He motivates the students. He also provides some hints or stimulation that can help students to get the right answer.

Criticizing or justifying categories of authority does not occur in observation. The themes that emerged were students doing/talking about something unrelated to the topic, students responding to the teacher's actions/talking with gestures or actions, and the teacher taking several actions to help the class run smoothly.

Conclusion

Both the teachers and the students were aware and understood that interaction was important in English learning. They also understood that to be able to interact well, they needed to practice. But, the understanding was not supported by what they did in classroom. The teachers did not give much interactive activity in class. It seemed that the teachers did not believe in the students' competence. There was not much chance for the students to interact either to the teachers or to the other students. The students were not active in practicing their English by asking questions or expressing their idea or opinion. The classroom condition did not make the students feel comfortable to interact in English. Feeling lack of vocabulary, afraid of making mistake, having no self confidence, and feeling ashamed were the students' barrier.

The interaction between the teachers and the students was limited / was based on the activities in the textbook. Reciprocal interaction in the use of English in communication did not happen. However, the use of media, like computer programs and various textbooks, increased the students' motivation to participate in the class activity. The media and the activities gave the students reasons to interact.

English was rarely used for communication in the classroom. The teacher and the students never spoke English. The teachers explained the material, gave instructions, and asked questions mostly in Indonesian. If the teachers used English expression, they followed it with the Indonesian translation. In the teachers' opinion, if they used English all the time without translation, the students would know nothing. The communication among the students was also in Indonesian. The use of English by the students was very limited when they practiced the lesson or dialogue asked by the teacher.

In making the students more active in class activity, the teachers pointed to or called certain student(s). Time for voluntary students to participate in class activity was also given. But, it was only certain student(s) who participated in class.

The teacher interacted with the whole class by accepting feeling, praising or encouraging, accepting or using ideas of the students, asking questions, lecturing, and giving directions. The teacher accepted the students' feeling when they expressed greeting in the beginning and the closing of the class. The teacher accepted or used the students' ideas when they invited the students to participate in class discussion. Lecturing was happened when the teacher presented or explained the material, discussed a dialogue or a picture. When the students did or talked something unrelated to the topic discussed, the teacher reminded them. Students' gestures were also found as their responses to the teachers' act or talk.

The teacher interacted with individual student by accepting feeling, praising or encouraging, accepting or using ideas of the student, asking questions, lecturing, and giving directions, reminding noisy student, and helping the student's work. The teacher accepted the students' feeling when s/he greeted the students and checked their attendance. The teacher accepted or used the students' ideas when s/he accepted the ideas or answers in class
discussion.

The student interacted with the teacher by giving response to the teacher's questions and giving initiation. The students' silence was often happened when they were asked by the teacher. The students did not directly answer or respond to the teacher's questions. The students' responses were in the form of responding to the teacher's greeting, answering the teacher's questions, and responding to the teacher's directions. The students' initiation was

asking questions about unclear writing, instruction of an activity, or difficult words or expressions.

The interaction among the students happened most of the time. But, mostly it was not about the English lesson. In relation to the English lesson, the students interacted with their friends by talking about the activity asked by the teacher, discussing the teacher's questions, and asking about difficult words or expressions. Students' act was also found as their responses to the teacher's act or talk. The conclusion looks common knowledge. Most teachers may know this already, but maybe only some of them realize these in their forethought. These aspects, i.e. the teacher-student and student-student interactions, need to be considered before teaching as a part of the lesson planning process.

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