The Teaching of
English Language Skills *and*
English Language Components

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CONTENTS

RESPONDING TO THE VARIETY OF LEARNERS' CHARACTERISTICS

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Learners are the focal point in an educational system. All educational efforts made are oriented towards the improvement of the personal, social, academic, and spiritual qualities of the learners. Good design of an educational system, perfect curriculum, competent teachers, complete and sophisticated facilities will be hardly meaningful unless followed by significant impact on the improvement of learners' quality. This is obvious because in the context of teaching and learning process, the word *learning* is learner-oriented. It is the learners who do the learning activities; it is the learners whose competence is improved; and it is the learners whose motivation is increased. In short, it is the learners who become the subjects of learning. Teachers' role is merely giving facility in order that the learners are able to achieve maximum success in the learning process. When the learners are lazy to learn, the teacher motivates them. When the learners face difficulties, the teacher helps them solve the problems. When the learners need materials to learn, the teacher provides them and becomes a resource person. In sum, in the learning process, learners should become the focus. All teachers' efforts are oriented to make them successful in achieving the educational goals.

In learner-centered classes, in which the number of learners can be more than thirty or so, the teacher faces a problem of divergent characteristics that needs to be solved wisely. Each learner has his/her own unique characteristics. If only there are forty students in a class, for instance, there are forty different characteristics that should be accommodated by the teacher, so that each student feels satisfied with the teacher's treatment. Hence, learning becomes effective. This paper tries to unfold the variety of learners' characteristics and what the teacher should do in response to the variability.

LEARNERS' CHARACTERISTICS

Learners' characteristics are limited to the variability of intelligences, learning styles, and motivation, which are elaborated in the followings.

Variability of Intelligences

Every human being is endowed with a capacity to interact with his/her environment. A psychologist from Harvard University, Howard Gardner, in his book entitled *Frames of Minds* introduces a concept of *Multiple Intelligences (MI)* (Gardner, 1983). He says that human beings do not have only one type of intelligence. There are seven types of intelligences, namely rhythmic, verbal (linguistic), visual (spatial), physical (kinesthetic), logical (mathematic), intrapersonal, and interpersonal intelligences.

A student who has a rhythmic or musical intelligence tends to be keen on singing, imitating a melody, listening to music, and playing a musical instrument. He/she can easily memorize melodies, identify sounds, and like to pay attention to rhythm. A learner who has a strong verbal (linguistic) intelligence is fond of reading, writing, telling stories, and capable of memorizing names, places, and dates. He/she can learn best through listening, reading, and articulating words. A learner with a strong visual (spatial) intelligence tends to be interested in drawing, painting, making visual design, looking at pictures, watching films, and making images. He/she has a good ability in understanding and memorizing maps, creating imaginary events, and recognizing visual changes. He/she learns best through visual media, using imagination, colors, pictures, and shapes. A learner who has a physical (kinesthetic) intelligence prefers to move, to touch, and to use his/her body to be creative. He/she learns most effectively by conducting physical activities, such as sports, dances, and actions. A person who has a strong logical (mathematic) intelligence likes to make experiments, to work with numbers, to ask analytical questions, and to explore rules and patterns. He/she is good at mathematics, logics, problem solving, and reasoning. The way to learn is usually through making categories, classifications, conclusions, and working with abstract patterns.

A learner who has a strong intrapersonal intelligence tends to be keen on working independently and pursue her/his personal obsession. He/she can understand himself/herself, his/her personal needs and wants, and make self-introspection. He/she is more successful if he/she learns independently and does individual tasks in accordance with his/her personal competence and individual pace. A student who has an interpersonal intelligence tends to enjoy having friends, likes to socialize, and prefers group-discussion to indi-

vidual tasks. He/she is capable of understanding other people, has strong leadership, and is able to organize, to communicate with others, and to resolve conflicts. He/she learns easily by cooperation and discussion.

Gardner (1983), furthermore, states that every individual learner has those intelligences. One or two types of intelligence, however, are more dominant than others. A music composer, for example, can be predicted to have a more dominant musical intelligence, an athlete or a choreographer has a stronger kinesthetic intelligence, a navigator has an outstanding spatial intelligence, whereas a polyglot must have a better verbal (linguistic) intelligence, and so forth.

Considering those varieties of intelligences, it can be said that there is no stupid or brainless learner in a classroom. Everyone has his/her own capacity. They just have different dominant intelligences. A learner who is weak at language, for instance, may be quite strong at making visual designs. A student who is weak at language and mathematics may be very good at sports, thus he/she can be a member of school football team. A learner who seems to be below average at school tests can be outstanding in playing musical instruments, hence becoming a member of the school band. What a classroom teacher should do, therefore, is to be able to recognize and identify the strengths and talents of each of his/her students, then to accommodate the variety so that each student feels satisfied and facilitated to make self-improvements. However, learners' characteristics are varied not only in cognitive aspect (intelligence) but also in learning styles.

Variability of Learning Styles

Learning style is a way naturally preferred by a learner to process and to remember information, and to acquire skills (Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams, 2005: 52). Learning style is closely related to the physical capacity most liked by the learner in order to learn, to interact with other people, and to think. Spratt et al. (2005) mention several learning styles, i.e. visual, auditory, kinesthetic, group (social), individual, reflective, and impulsive.

A learner who has a visual style learns best through a sight sense, whereas an auditory learner learns most effectively through hearing. A learner who has a kinesthetic style learns best through practice and bodily activities, such as touching, rubbing, and moving. A learner with group (social) style prefers to learn through working with others, e.g. discussion, whereas an individual learner likes to work independently. A reflective learner is likely to be more successful if he/she has enough time to think deeply and to make her/his own choice, while an impulsive learner is able to give an immediate and quick response without being given much time to think.

Spratt et al. (2005) also claim that learners not only have varied learning styles but also have different learning strategies. Some of them like to learn by memorizing the meaning of new words and putting them in sentences in their minds, while others may like to make a direct experiment using the newly-known words in conversation or in writing. Some learners like to guess the meanings of words by themselves, while some others feel more secure to ask their teachers or their friends or to look them up in dictionaries. Some learners like to record their own speech and check their pronunciation, but some others prefer to pay attention to others' speech and imitate it.

Shortly stated, each student has individual preference to a learning style and strategy. There is no panacea in strategy. Each learner prefers to use a certain strategy suitable with his/her personality and style. A teacher should be able to recognize learners' individual preferences and strive to create a conducive situation so that the effectiveness of learning process is optimized. In addition to the wide-ranging inborn natural cognitive capacities and habitual learning strategies, learners also have motivational variability.

Variability of Motivation

There are several factors which affect learners' motivation to learn at school, among others are material, method, teacher, facility, and friends. Some students enjoy learning at school because they are interested in the lesson. They feel that the subject is easy, fun, and contains a lot of exciting puzzles that stimulate them to think actively. Some others are engrossed in the lesson because they believe that by learning it they will get useful competence for a decent job. Still, others like the lesson because they feel that it is exciting, useful, and relevant with their lives.

Besides, there are students who enjoy being in the class because the teacher implements various strategies or methods with a range of fun games. They are not told to sit quietly, are not lectured, are not given explanation and information without being actively involved in the activities which challenge cognitively and require physical mobility. They are not only ordered to open worksheets, do exercises, and submit them within limited time without being corrected, checked, or given feedback.

Furthermore, learners are motivated not only by materials and methods, but they are also motivated by the teacher's factor. When the teacher is patient, helpful, always gives praise and encouragement, respects what the learners do, and never undermines their competence, the learners will

feel secure under his/her guidance. The teacher knows and calls them by names, recognizes their preferences, needs, and difficulties. There is a good rapport between the teacher and the learners. Hence, learners become motivated to learn.

Sometimes, students feel comfortable when they are at school because of the facility factor. There is a spacious grassy yard with shady trees and colorful flowers. The classrooms are clean, neat, and convenient, with air-conditioner, light, and fresh air. They are equipped with complete facilities such as television set, video player, LCD, computer, library, and other learning resources which can be used by students to improve their competence. Yet, there are other learners who are motivated to learn at school because of their friends. There is such close relationship among friends that they miss each other when do not meet during long vacation, for example.

The diversity of learners' intelligences, learning styles and strategies, and motivation should be taken into consideration by the teacher in order to take some measures to make the teaching and learning process effective.

MEASURES FOR EFFECTIVE PROCESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The measures which are used to make the process of teaching and learning effective are related to selecting and adapting materials, and varying strategies which include varying interaction patterns, varying teachers' and learners' roles, as well as varying activities.

Selecting and Adapting Materials

There are basically two types of language teaching and learning materials: authentic and pedagogic (Tomlinson, 1998). Authentic materials refer to those taken from real life sources and they are not designed for teaching and learning purposes. Some examples are newspapers, magazines, advertisements, brochures, poems, songs, announcements, e-mail, post-cards, short messages, food ingredients, product wrappings, train schedules, and restaurant menu. They can be taken to be materials brought to the classrooms. Pedagogic materials, on the other hand, are the materials designed for teaching and learning purposes such as text books, students' worksheets, and abridged versions of novels.

The main difference between authentic and pedagogic materials lies on the naturalness of language used. Authentic materials have more natural language and reflect real life. The language of pedagogic materials, on the other hand, has usually been modified and adjusted according to the learning ob-

jectives and the level of learners' ability. Being non-modified, authentic materials are often over-challenging and sometimes not quite appropriate for certain levels of learners. In order to be usable, therefore, the teacher should select and adapt them in such a way that they become more appropriate with the teaching and learning goals and the level of the learners. However, authentic materials are often more interesting because they reflect real life phenomena.

The teacher should prepare a wide range of materials, authentic and pedagogic, to accommodate the variety of learners' characteristics. The materials used in the classrooms can be in visual forms such as texts, pictures, graphs, maps, schemes, and tables. They can also be audio materials like recorded songs, oral announcements at the airport, radio news, lectures, speeches, campaigns, and conversations. Or, they can be in audio-visual forms, such as films, computer programs, slides, and VCDs. The materials will be more effective and efficient when presented using appropriate media. In that way, learners are able to perceive them better using their seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and/or tasting senses.

Varying Interaction Patterns

To accommodate learners' variety of learning styles, it is important that the teacher consider implementing various interaction patterns in the classrooms. The one-way interaction pattern, such as teacher-students (T à Ss), is commonly happening in most conventional classes, in which the teacher lectures and gives explanation and information. This, however, gives much benefit to auditory learners only, and not much to others. Therefore, to maximize the intensity of interaction, the teacher should use other interaction patterns such as teacher-student, student-teacher, class-teacher, student-student, student-class, students in small groups, and student working individually. Harmer (2001: 114) states that in managing classes there are some ways of grouping students, namely "whole-class teaching, students on their own, pair-work, and group-work".

The teacher-student (T ßà S) interaction, where the teacher interacts with an individual student, can be effective to stimulate reluctant learners to be more active because the interaction is done personally and individually. Interaction can also be done following a class-teacher pattern, in which the learners are given a chance to initiate communication by asking questions, and giving comments or suggestions.

Pair-work can also be very effective to make students more active. A quiet student who is shy to work in a larger group may become more open

when he/she works in pairs. In that way, each learner has more opportunities to speak up and be more actively involved in classroom activities compared to that in whole-class or small group discussions. However, to accommodate learners with individual learning style, it is also good that the teacher sometimes provides a chance for students to work on their own, such as through reading silently, writing compositions, creating individual works, and working on exercises.

Varying Teachers' and Learners' Roles

There are several roles that the teacher can play in the teaching and learning process depending on the types of the activities conducted. The teacher's ability in performing any of those roles indicates his/her professional competence. Generally speaking, however, in the context of learner-centered approach, the main role of the teacher is as a facilitator, meaning that he/she gives facilities to the learners to do the learning process. All other roles are performed in the context of being a facilitator.

Spratt et al. (2005) and Harmer (2001), though using different terms, mention several roles that the teacher should perform in the context of facilitating students' learning process. The teacher can have a role as a planner, a manager, a monitor, an involver, a diagnostician, a resource, an informer, and a parent/friend.

As a planner, the teacher prepares a lesson including the materials to be presented in the teaching and learning process, the activities to be conducted, the media to be used, and the exercises to be done. All of these are prepared in varieties in order to accommodate the divergent characteristics of the learners. As a manager, the teacher manages the teaching and learning activities so that these activities run smoothly and students are able to perform them properly. While the learners are performing the activities individually, in pairs, or in small groups, the teacher should also monitor them to see if they can do the tasks properly, or whether they have difficulties, thus giving them some help.

The teacher can also perform a role as an involver by which he/she has an obligation to make all students in the classroom actively involved in the activities conducted. If one of the learners seems to be reluctant to participate actively in the lesson and tend to be quiet, passive, and taciturn, the teacher is obliged to involve them either by changing the strategy, for example giving pair-work or asking them questions. Another role the teacher can play is as a diagnostician. Like a physician, the teacher diagnoses problems or difficulties the learners are facing. Hence, he/she is able to help them with appropriate solutions.

As a resource, the teacher can become a referent for the learners to consult when they need some materials, information, or knowledge. As an informer, furthermore, the teacher can also provide the learners with some useful, relevant information in order to improve and up-date their knowledge. Sometimes, the teacher may perform a role as a parent or friend with whom learners can share feelings and consult to get good advice to solve personal problems.

Learners, on the other hand, also have various roles. They are not only passive recorders of information like a mug and the teacher is like a jug, but also participants who are actively engaged in the activities, questioners who take the initiative to ask questions, or discoverers who are actively involved in thinking process and discover by themselves rules and patterns based on some available data. The teacher should create a condition in which students can perform these various roles.

Varying Activities

In response to the divergent characteristics of learners, it is recommended that the teacher not only vary materials, interaction patterns, and roles but also conduct various activities in the classroom. That is to accommodate as many personal preferences as students may have. Some of the alternative tasks that the learners can do are using songs, matching pictures, playing games, doing role plays, having discussions, listening to speeches, and so forth. Songs, liked almost by everybody, can be used in the classroom for various activities such as listening comprehension, reordering words, filling gaps, lining up, practicing pronunciation, and focusing on grammar and/or vocabulary. These may accommodate auditory learners.

Matching pictures with sentences or phrases may be fascinating when it is appropriate with the level of learners' abilities, and beneficial especially for visual learners. There are a wide range of games that students can play in the classroom such as board race, corner race, and guessing games. These can be exciting and give benefit to the learners with kinesthetic style. Role play is another challenging activity in the classroom which students may enjoy. This is suitable for those who have kinesthetic, social, or auditory learning style. Discussion is, by all means, interesting for students who have social style, whether it is done in pairs, small groups, or whole-class. Finally, listening to the teacher's explanation, speech, or lectures may sometimes be done because it can also give benefit to auditory learners.

CONCLUSION

The trend in making learner-centered educational effort requires that learners, with all their characteristics, personal needs, and preferences, be satisfied by the classroom teaching and learning process. This poses a problem for the teacher because he/she is demanded to be able to accommodate the variety of those characteristics. What the teacher should do, consequently, is selecting and adapting materials and implementing various strategies by using a variety of interaction patterns, performing various teacher and learner roles, and conducting a wide range of activities.

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The Teaching of English Language Skills and English Language Components is a compilation of 20 selected papers that were presented in the First National English Language Teachers and Lecturers Conference in Indonesia conducted at State University of Malang, East Java, on March 21, 2009. The chapters in this book discuss various issues divided into 5 sections: The Teaching of EFL Listening and Speaking; The teaching of EFL Reading and Writing; The Teaching of Integrated Skills of English; The Teaching of English Language Components; and Learners, Materials, and Assessment in the Teaching of English. The various topics covered within the 5 sections are expected to give teachers and those interested in ELT more insights on the teaching of English language skills and English language components. It is also expected that the book can contribute to the development of learners' English language proficiency. Toward this end is the edited volume dedicated.

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