

CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION: A CASE OF A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EFL CONTEXT

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Although learning English has been started formally in Indonesia at high school level, unfortunately, students' English mastery remains low. Classroom participation is considered the trigger of the immastery. The research was aimed to depict the quality of students' classroom participation and its factors.

An English teacher and 13 seventh graders of a public Junior High School in Bandung served as respondents. The data derived from the video-recording and interviews were analyzed using Suherdi's theory (2006).

The result showed the students' classroom participation quality in the observed class was low. It was characterized by teacher domination, students' low contribution, and students' improper learning behavior.

The quality was assumed to be influenced by teacher's incompetence in class management, teacher's questioning strategy, and students' self-confidence and their vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: classroom participation, teacher's competence, English mastery

Background

English teaching in Indonesia still faces many problems. One of the most common problems is the poor level of students' classroom participation. This phenomenon is indicated by students' choring participation, and students' resistance of participation (Suherdi, 2002a, cited in Suherdi 2006). As the consequence, students may lack of and even lose the opportunity of practicing English. Concerning the importance of students' classroom participation, two research conducted by Lim (1992 cited in Nunan, 1999, p.48) and Tsou (2005) have both shown students' classroom participation is related significantly to improvement in language proficiency.

The quality of students' classroom participation, which can reflect the teaching-learning process passed by the students and the students' level of classroom participation deeper, has been identified. Through this identification, teachers may get information about the level of students-teacher interaction, students' linguistic contribution, and students' learning behavior and their influencing factors. The results of this identification may be an indicator to show the extent of success in conducting teaching-learning process and how it affects their participation.

Therefore, this research aimed at revealing how the quality of students' classroom participation and what factors influence the quality.

Research Methodology

The present research involved an English teacher and 13 students of seventh grade of a public Junior High School in Bandung. A descriptive method was employed. The data were collected through video-recording and informal interviews. Video-recording was conducted to get information about the real classroom situation of the selected site which capturing participation pattern during the English teaching-learning process. Then, clarification and elaboration were gathered through informal interviews conducted to all respondents.

The data were firstly analyzed to depict the pattern and quality of students' classroom participation and its possible influencing factors. The data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by using the modified version of classroom discourse framework of analysis (DA) developed by Suherdi (2006). Based on this framework of analysis, the quality of students' classroom participation is depicted through the quality of students-teacher interaction, the linguistic quality of students' contribution, and the content of students' learning behavior during the teaching-learning process. The approach used was simple, quick, and straightforward and covers complete characteristics of analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The video-recording of English teaching-learning process, conducted four times lasting 90 minutes each, revealed that problems in students' classroom participation also occurred. Few students participated in classroom activities, while the rest kept silence. When they participated, they preferred to get involved only in choring participation.

Based on the analysis results, it is found that the quality of students' classroom participation characterized by common learning activity led by the teacher, the lack of students' natural (volunteered) involvement, the low level of students' linguistic contribution, and the low level of students' learning behavior. The detail results of data analysis are presented in Table 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1:
Different Move Patterns of Class Interaction

Type of Exchange	Move	1 st Meeting	2 nd Meeting	3 rd Meeting	4 th Meeting	Total	%
Knowledge-Oriented	k1	17	27	18	24	86	26.46%
	k2	13	7	17	14	51	15.69%
	dk1	33	45	32	26	136	41.85%
	ds1	8	1	6	8	23	7.08%
Action-Oriented	a1	1	2	1	1	5	1.54%
	a2	3	1	10	4	18	5.54%
Skill-Oriented	s1	-	-	1	4	5	1.54%
	s2	1	-	-	-	1	0.31%

**Table 2:
Different Language Element Found in Class Interaction**

No.	Language Element	1 st Meeting	2 nd Meeting	3 rd Meeting	4 th Meeting	Total	%
1.	Syllable	7	-	6	-	13	4.14%
2.	Word	38	39	70	36	183	58.28%
3.	Phrase	8	19	20	2	49	15.60%
4.	Clause	5	7	9	6	27	8.60%
5.	Sentence	19	2	11	10	42	13.38%

**Table 3:
Different learning behavior found in Class Interaction**

No.	Learning Behavior	1 st Meeting	2 nd Meeting	3 rd Meeting	4 th Meeting	Total	%
1.	C1	71	43	77	32	214	60.97%
2.	C2	2	3	3	1	10	2.85%
3.	A1	19	11	27	20	76	21.65%
4.	A2	3	20	12	2	43	12.25%
5.	A5	-	-	-	1	1	0.28%
6.	P1	-	1	6	-	7	1.99%

The informal interviews conducted to the teacher depicted that his understanding towards students' classroom participation in teaching-learning process. He considered classroom participation played an important part in a learning process. He assumed it could raise other students' participation. He claimed that by developing a good image of the teacher and his class through joyful learning could trigger students' participation. Since the teacher managed his class in students' mother tongue, the participation took 70% of the session. By doing so, he could avoid misunderstanding. He found that his students' participation was low due to less self-confidence and less vocabulary mastery.

Meanwhile, the students' interview results depict the students' perception towards their classroom participation and English teaching-learning conducted in their classroom. Most students considered the class was full of joy. The teacher brought humors to live the class. They, sometimes, got bored of the lesson despite the inability to understand their teacher speaking in English which made few of them got sleepy. They claimed their teacher

often motivated them to get good achievement and prestige. But they complained that it made them bored easily. They correlated the participation they involved in with the score they would get. The more they participated, the better the score would be. Some students' participation was due to nomination, while others voluntary. When participating, they mostly communicated in Bahasa Indonesia, their mother tongue. Their participation mostly involved word level. They had problem in making sentences in English. They asked their friends or recourse to a dictionary in order to solve their problems.

Teacher domination may make students get less exposure in using English, particularly through classroom participation. Teacher's domination in classroom interaction was characterized by teacher's initiation as the primary knower in giving teacher's information or explanation (k1), teacher's genuine question (k2), teacher's testing question (dk1), teacher's non-verbal action in preparing the lesson (a1), teacher's non-assessment instruction to the students (a2), teacher's initiative in doing non-negotiated exchange (s1), teacher's initiation in giving verbal communication to the students (s2), and teacher's instruction by nominating the students to answer some questions (ds1). Those moves were teacher's effort in controlling and directing the teaching-learning process since the teacher might consider the students' learning behavior performed in minimum level. Aside from the teacher's aims in dominating classroom interaction, Brown (2001, pp.169) claims that teacher's role in creating an interactive classroom is by initiating the interaction and stimulating the students during the teaching-learning process for continued interaction. Therefore, teacher's role as one of substantial source of live target language input in the classroom should not overlap with the teacher's talk.

The low level of students' linguistic contribution characterized by language elements that took the forms of low level (syllable, word, and phrase) and high level form of linguistic element (clause and sentence). These forms of language element occurred in students' utterance in completing the teacher's explanation, answering teacher's genuine and teacher's testing questions, performing assessment or non-assessment task, and raising question to the teacher. It is argued that the dominant use of word element (58.28%) caused by the students' difficulty in using a more complicated form of language, especially in translated the words into English. The data also revealed that high level of linguistic elements (clause and sentence) in English mostly occurred when the students read aloud the sentences or dialogue stated on the textbook or when they performed verbal action in Bahasa Indonesia.

The research showed that between the use of Bahasa Indonesia and English in the classroom, greater portion of Bahasa Indonesia is used by the students since they have difficulty in using English. When they use English, they needed to do some preparation first. The use of Bahasa Indonesia (as the students' mother tongue) with greater portion is in line with the code switching case found by Nunan (2000, pp. 190). He found that the far greater use of the mother tongue than they do of the target language had been found in many foreign language classrooms. Related to this fact, Zlim (1989 cited in Nunan, 2000, p.190) in an investigation of target language use in her German classes, revealed that one of the factors in code-switching was the use of the mother tongue (English) by the teacher herself. She discovered when she increased her use of German (the target language), her students also used German. Similar result was also found by Turnbull (1999 cited in Bateman, 2008, p.21), he found that there was a positive relationship between the amount of target language used by instructors in class and the students' achievement in language proficiency.

The low level of students' learning behavior was characterized by the form of students' response that involved recalling prior knowledge (C1), comprehending the previous learning material given (C2), accepting and considering learning stimulus (A1), responding certain stimulus actively (A2), characterizing by integrating and determining certain values as

a part of the students themselves (A5), and imitating a basic skill (P2). From the data presented on the table, it can be depicted that the total number of low level learning behavior (C1, C2, A1, A2, and P1) was bigger than the high level learning behavior (A5). This fact indicates the students' participation was on the level of simple expressions that involved recalling, small percentage of comprehending, accepting, responding, characterizing, and imitating skill. Regarding to this analysis, the students' low level of learning behavior may be resulted from the teacher's questioning strategy. This case is in line with Suherdi (2007, pp.144) who argues that good question strategy will encourage students to give a good response.

The factors that might be considered influence the three conditions above, among others are firstly the teacher's competence. This research found, despite the opportunity offered by the teacher, the students are more likely to participate in choring form (answering the teacher's question together with other friends). This assumes learning situation that provides clear connection between academic subjects and the students' daily lives helps students understand the meaning of the given academic material.

Secondly, students' self-confidence seems to be the most determining factor of the quality of the students' classroom participation since most students were firstly nominated before they got involved in classroom activity. The last factor is the students' vocabulary mastery. When the students did not know how to communicate in English, they were likely to avoid participating in the class. This fact might also be related to less exposure in the teaching-learning process. Hence, students were not motivated to learn more.

Conclusion

As a way of providing comprehensible input that can help students' language proficiency development, particularly in language classroom, promoting the students' classroom participation and its quality should not be put aside. Therefore, teachers with professional and pedagogic competences will enable to reach the quality of students' classroom participation. However, the factors that may influence the quality of students' classroom participation may depend on the teacher's and the student's investment.

Proper trainings on required competence for teachers may also elevate the quality of participation. Teacher's competence in stimulating contexts relevant to learning process and on questioning strategy will provide good opportunities for students to get involved in classroom activities. Furthermore, providing students more exposure on the practice of language use may stimulate their learning behavior and their strategy to study the language they are learning.

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