SHOULD ENGLISH-ONLY METHOD BE APPLIED IN EFL CLASSES

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Abstract

The challenge that many English learners in Indonesia cannot speak English fluently has been an issue for years. Numerous studies have been conducted to answer the question and they blamed the methods applied by English teachers. Also, researchers have proposed many methods to boost English learners' communicative skill especially speaking skill. However, most methods used in English classes do not become habits as teachers may change them to avoid boredom in the class. Being able to speak English is about how to make speaking English as habit, so students will automatically switch their language as they enter their English classes. Some teachers across the globe force students to speak English and make it as a habit in their classes. The English-only method is believed as an effective way to build learners' confidence and fluency in speaking. How is this method applied in an EFL classroom? How does it affect learners' confidence and fluency in speaking? This paper aims to provide alternative way with its controversy to increase English learners' speaking ability.

Key words: *English-only method, speaking skill, English learners, EFL classroom*

1. Introduction

Have you ever experience a real English atmosphere in your EFL classroom? Or are you dreaming of having learners in your class speak English willingly? If you are a language teacher, the goal of your teaching activity must be having your students able to communicate in the language you are teaching. However, have you thought about how to create such condition? Trying numerous methods to have your students fluently or at least confidently speak English proves that maybe some of your methods do not work out. The main goal of a foreign language classroom is to enable language learners listen, speak, read and write or simply, communicate using the

language they are learning. However, due to teachers' lack of knowledge and experience, the goal of language learning turns to be able to grammatically understand language without being aware if learners can use it or not. Therefore, learning English turns to be a nightmare that many students avoid as they think the language they are learning is somewhat complicated.

If you want your students able to listen and read for gist and details, then teach them by providing them conversation and text and verify their comprehension by asking them questions. If you want your students able to write, then show them good models of text and guide them how to start writing. Finally, if you want students speak English confidently and fluently, then ask them to speak English as their habit.

Various methods for speaking class have been proposed and some are very effective for language classes. However, teachers cannot apply the same method over and over as students might feel bored with the same methods. However, just like many people said that practice makes perfect. Being familiar with a situation is the way to involve in that situation. Creating an English atmosphere is not a bad idea to ground English in students' daily conversation. Therefore, some experts in English language teaching recommend teachers to apply English-only method in their classroom where students are encouraged to speak using English only. However, there are some points that proposed by the opponent of English-only classroom.

This paper examines the arguments for and against the use of English-only method in English classes. This paper presents the theory of second language acquisition, some pros and cons of using English-only method and some suggestions for teachers.

2. Theoritical Background

Second Language Acquisition Theory

Language cannot be learned within a short period of time. It is believed that learning language takes quite long time as it deals with many aspects. Learners need to encouragement to communicate using the language they are learning as they might

encounter difficulties in using the language dealing with anxiety. This is the challenge that every English teacher needs to solve. It is not as easy as pie to have learners communicate fluently in the classroom as there is a set of complex problem involved in it such as insufficient vocabulary,

Second language acquisition theories put a trust on the use of 'English-only' method as when learners have opportunities to the language exposure in term of oral communication, their L2 proficiency can be well-enhanced (Ellis, 2005). Second language theorists believe that language is acquired by children, but it is learned by adults (Krashen, 1982: p. 10). However, it is debatable as adults can also acquire a language while they are communicating in their daily conversation. For example, a non-native English speaker who is studying in an English-speaking country can acquire language even though one does not attend a language class. The acquisition process happens when people communicate each other. In learning a language, learners absolutely need more exposure to the language as it can give them experience on how to use the language. Having the rules explained in the classroom, sometimes learners only learn it but not acquire it (Krashen 1982: p. 51). This is where the distinction between learning and acquisition appear.

Learning involves awareness on the language structure while acquisition involves confidence and fluency in communication. It turns to be tragic when learners master the structure of language, but is unable to apply their knowledge to communicate using the language they have learned. It is, therefore, necessary for learners need to be coerced to communicate using the language they are learning. It is the job of teacher to entice their learners in order to boost their learners' confidence. Teachers are responsible to give their learners more exposure to the language as they might not get it outside their classroom especially when people around them do not speak English.

3. Method

Arguments for the Use of English-only Approach

It is a tragedy when language teachers teach their students a language, but students cannot communicate using the language they learn. Unfortunately, this tragedy happens in many language classes especially English. As a teacher, have you ever made flashback to see what was wrong in your class that made you failed achieving your goal?

It is the goal of English teacher to have learners able to communicate English without being anxious. However, the path is not always easy which means it needs big effort both from teachers and students. Some theorists believe that to make students communicate using the language they are learning; cat-o'-nine-tails might be needed. The cat-o'-nine-tails here refers to rules set by teachers in the classroom.

One study conducted by Hubner (2013) found that 70% of the participants agree that full immersion is considered the best way to study English. However, it might not be easy for learners as it costs much money even though there are many language schools provides a language program where learners learn the English in the English-speaking country. If one way does not work, another way might help. Teacher cannot assign students to learn English through full immersion due to the limitation. However, it does not mean that it is impossible to give learners more opportunity and exposure to English. Through English-only approach, teachers can create English atmosphere in the classroom. It is the English-only method, a structured immersion method, where both teachers and students communicate using English without interference of their L1. There have been arguments between those who are for and against the English-only approach across the globe.

Some teachers insist that using L1 while giving instructions to students works well. Surprisingly, Hubner (2013) found that even native speakers of English agree that learning learners' L1 does not help them in teaching. In his study, the proportion of those who agree that students should only allow to speak English in the classroom is bigger than those who disagree.

Another argument for the application of structured immersion is that the use of English by teachers enables learners to be more exposed to the language (Mahira, 2012). Logically, when there is more input, learners can gain more knowledge and it will automatically impact on their vocabulary and comprehension skill. That teachers commit to use only English during their teaching time exposes learners to English supports this view arguing that greater exposure to second language leads learners to greater potential the target language learning (Ellis, 2005). However, Lee (2013) suggests that structured-immersion class needs to correspond and represent the real-world atmosphere so that it contains real communication and authenticity of the target language (Lee, 2013). Teachers, therefore, are suggested to have sufficient resources and experience in order to provide engaging teaching materials so that learners have more L2 input that they do not gain outside their classroom.

Provided real experience and a lot of opportunities to interact, learners' confidence can increase as they take risk in comprehending the target language without being well-prepared (Lee, 2013). Learners will learn how to handle a situation when they encounter difficulties in communication without being hesitate. Having accustomed with the situation without assistance, learners will be more independent and confident. As the English-only classroom's goal is to maximize the use of target language, teacher must be able to maintain this situation. The teachers' role is to guide students by providing them with the best learning environment that can benefit them in order to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

In the Anglophone environment, it is not likely that learners get real experience in speaking English as they might be hesitant and reluctant to speak to other people outside their English classroom. Tragically, there are numerous English classes where even teachers do not use English which aggravate the situation of English learning. It is the reasonable for teachers to be autonomous and creative in encouraging learners. English learners need to be immersed into an English-speaking environment to provide opportunities for them to practice their knowledge so that they can be confident, fluent and independent in communicating using their target language.

Arguments Against the Use of English-only Approach

There has been debate on the effectiveness of English only approach in English language teaching. Some linguists believe that neglecting learners' L1 is not wise as they can take advantage from their mother tongue. Those who are against the English only classroom argue that using L1 or bilingual class is effective and necessary especially for adult learners whose L1 literacy is limited. Moreover, learners can benefit from their linguistic knowledge at any level of ESL (Auerbach, 1993). Learners feel more free to express their ideas without having difficulties related to language and by using their L1, teachers can supply more input to their learners.

Hsu (2007) argue that maintaining the use of L1 in English classes can also maintain the ethnic languages and culture. Talking about learners' L2 use, Hsu (2007) states that learners' characteristics such as attitude and motivation affect learners' success in second or foreign language learning. Learners who have positive attitude and self-motivation since the beginning of their class are more likely to achieve better that those who are not. So, it is not structured immersion that benefits them, but their own characteristics.

In the study of examining the application of English-only, Espinoza-Herold (2013) found that the method has frustrated teachers. Teachers feel under pressure as they must be able to restrict their students of speaking using their L1. In details, she also found that this kind of rule impact on the balance of students and teachers' interaction in the classroom. Students take longer time to think what they want to express and how they send their message correctly while teachers have to work extra on understanding what their learners say.

Reexamining the use of English only, Hoang (2010) revealed that the English only approach did not guarantee that students would have deeper understanding of their lessons. Moreover, the majority of students are found reluctant to communicate in their target language. This is because students are afraid of making mistakes in the classroom.

4. Result and Discussion

Suggestions for Teachers

Qualified teacher is the key of successful English classroom while student is the central focus. It is, therefore, teachers are expected to be able to achieve their teaching goals. It is demanding for teachers to be creative and consistent to improve their teaching performance. Here are some suggestions for teachers on how to apply the English-only method in their English classes:

a. Make an agreement with students that they must speak English in the classroom. For new class or lower level class, the duration of English-only can be justified.

b. Always begin every class with some small talk in English. Teachers can ask students and have them asking each other using English. Then, teachers give feedback by correcting some mistakes when needed. This brainstorming activity can be done for 5 until 15 minutes.

c. Provide students with feedback to correct their mistakes during the class.

Students need encouragement to use their knowledge and it is the teachers' role to encourage them and provide real environment in order to boost their performance.

4. Conclusion and Remark

The use of English-only is reasonable based on pedagogical grounds and considered "a natural and common sense practice" (Auerbach, 1993, p. 1). Students who get more exposure to English get more real experience that can lead them to great learning progress. Provided real experience, learners can shape their vocabulary and comprehension skill. Moreover, with the structured immersion, learners will be more confident and independent in using the L2. However, there has been possibility that interaction among students and teachers get distracted and students feel reluctant to communicate even with their classmates. Despite of its weaknesses, there are still some advantages of using English-only method which need to be considered by teachers.

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