

Developing Students' Language Awareness through Discovery Learning in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Language acquisition has strong relation with language awareness which is very important in order to be a good language user, because it is a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of language and its role in human life. It deals with explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use. Language awareness includes the knowledge about language, a conscious understanding of how languages work, of how people learn them and use them. In English language teaching the use of language in classroom interaction is not only for communication, it is also used to deliver norm through language, meanwhile in Indonesia, most of student is multilingual where they have already acquired languages, including their mother tongue and their national language, the students' awareness in learning foreign language such English is a crucial issue to be considered. One of technique that can be used to develop students' language awareness is through discovery learning. It is an inquiry-based theory which encourages students to be active agents in their own learning process, including in language learning. Discovery learning in English language teaching allows the students to work on language by having a role in their own learning and developing their activity through the language. So, this paper aims to give an overview how to apply discovery learning in English language teaching to develop student language awareness.

Key words: *Language awareness, discovery learning, English language teaching.*

1. Introduction

The term of language awareness is introduced in the beginning of 1980s by linguist Erick Hawkins. It is defined as a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life (Donmall in Ellis, 2012:2). Language awareness deals with being aware of different languages and the variety of ways in which they are spoken. Language awareness also includes being aware of the pattern in language because insight into pattern underlies the successful learning of foreign language. It is also related to the understanding about the relationship between language and culture, the awareness of the way language usage varies in different social contexts, the awareness of language as a nuanced and complex system of verbal and non-verbal communication, the understanding of how language is acquired, and the awareness of one's own language learning.

The awareness of students in learning a foreign language is important to be developed because students' knowledge of languages leads to a greater and more confident use of acquired languages. Developing an awareness of how languages work creates a greater interest in languages already acquired and in learning new languages. Developing an awareness of languages also makes people more curious about languages and more open to acquiring them. Positive awareness of language diversity in the world also leads to a more positive attitude towards cultural diversity.

In West Sumatera, English is learned as a foreign language where the students has already acquire two languages, Minangkabau language and Indonesian language as a national language.

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Thus, the awareness of how these languages work, the acquired language and foreign language that will be learned, is important issues to be concerned. There are three main ways in which Hawkins in Ellie (2012:4) see foreign language learning contributing to language awareness; it provides positive feedback on the mother tongue and cultural stereotypes; it encourages the learner to pay close attention to words and their meanings; and it builds confidence in mathetic function of language which promotes by Halliday in Hawkins (199:136) which includes the use of language to learn about the world and to learn about reality.

Students seldom think about their language unless they are asked to do so explicitly or by way of learning activities. Developing students' language awareness in English as foreign language teaching classroom can be done through discovery learning. Discovery learning is an inquiry-based theory which encourages students to be active agents in their own learning process (Chambers, Thiekotter and Chambers, 2013: 109). It enables the students to have a role in their own learning and developing their creativity as they work on problems. It is expected that the students has learning autonomy where the center of learning is focused on students as well as they work with language on their own role. Consequently, this paper try to propose the discovery learning method to enhance students' language awareness is English as foreign language teaching classroom.

2. Discussion

a. The Nature of Language Awareness

Language awareness, which refers to learners' development of an enhanced consciousness of the forms and functions of language, helps students reflect on language in use (Callies, Keller & Lucas in Yang, 2013: 325). Furthermore Soons, (2008:7) states that students' awareness of language relates to their cognitive psychology and associated with the study of the thinking process in learning contexts, i.e. how knowledge is established and how thoughts are organized. Students in foreign language learning should be stimulated to ask questions about language, how it functions and what role it plays in people's lives; in other words, to have an explicit approach to different phenomena of language.

Regarding to the role of language awareness, it is important to understand the cognitive aspect of language awareness. First is explicit learning approach. As the language awareness dealing with the explicit knowledge about language, explicit learning is believed more effective than implicit learning because it facilitates the learners toward kinds of language features and actively involved in processing the input. Soon (2008:11) explains that explicit learning implicates that the learner is capable of describing his/her thought process and talking about a particular characteristic of knowledge, with help from a more or less formal metalanguage. Thus, explicit learning and instruction become crucial in the classroom, because they stimulate language awareness and enhance language acquisition.

Second cognitive aspect of language awareness is consciousness. Schmidt in Soons (2008:12) distinguishes four common meanings of the word consciousness and these are: (1) Consciousness as intention. In learning this highlights a contrast between intentional (on purpose) and incidental learning. For example, the acquisition of a first language is always incidental since we never choose to learn our mother tongue. (2) Consciousness as attention. This includes such notions as noticing and focusing. Schmidt means that noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for converting input into intake. (3) Consciousness as awareness. In this sense, consciousness means 'having knowledge of', either perceptually or metacognitively. In language learning it often refers to knowing rules, but it could also refer to noticing, which makes it hard to distinguish consciousness as attention (and hence noticing) from consciousness as awareness.

b. Discovery Learning in English Language Teaching

Discovery learning can be defined simply as a learning situation in which the principal content of what is to be learned is not given, but must be independently discovered by the

learner, making the student an active participant in his learning. According to Tenenbaum, Alfieri, Brooks and Aldrich (2010:2) discovery learning occurs whenever the learner is not provided with the target information or conceptual understanding and must find it independently and with only the provided materials. Discovery learning mode requires that the student participates in making many of the decisions about what, how, and when something is to be learned and even plays a major role in making such decisions. Instead of being told the content by the teacher, it is expected that the student will have to explore examples and from these examples discover the principles or concepts, which are to be learned. Discovery learning is a method that encourages students to arrive at a conclusion based upon their own activities and observations. It assumes that learners takes an active role and construct their own knowledge base. Sometimes discovery learning describes as learning by doing because it takes place in situations where learners draw on their own experiences and knowledge to solve problems.

Ministry of Education and Culture (2013:13) states that the benefits of discovery learning model selection include; a) helping learners to improve and enhance the skills and cognitive processes, b) the knowledge gained is personal and powerful because it strengthen understanding, retention, and transfer, c) making a fun learning, d) allow learners develop quickly and in accordance with their own pace, e) Causing learners direct their learning activities use both the mind and motivation, f) assist learners in reinforcing their self concept, g) Assist students dispel doubts because it leads to the final truth experienced, h) encouraging students to think intuitively, initiatively in formulating hypotheses, i) developing talent, motivation, and curiosity and j) studying from various types of learning resources.

Bruner in Weible (2011:9) explores six based problems in discovery learning where it is aimed at an approach to learning that allows the child not only to learn the material that is presented in a school setting, but to learn it in such a way that he can use the information in problem solving. These six problems in discovery learning namely attitude, compatibility, activation, practice, the “self-loop” problem and capacity for handling information flow.

1) *Attitude*

The attitude problem deals with how the teacher arranges learning that the children recognizes when they has information they can go beyond it. It leads them to aware that there is connectedness between the facts they have learned with other data and situations. The pupils must have the attitude toward their ability to use their head effectively to solve a problem. Basically, this is an attitudinal problem which deals with something that will counteract inertness in that students will recognize the material that they have learned as an occasion for going beyond it.

2) *Compatibility*

The compatibility problem is related to the way teacher gets the children to approach new material that they are learning in such a fashion that they fit it into their own system of associations, subdivisions, categories, and frames of reference, in order that they can make it their own and thus be able to use the information in a fashion compatible with what they already know.

3) *Activation*

Third involves getting the child activated so that he can experience his own capacity to solve problems and have enough success so that he can feel rewarded for the exercise of thinking.

4) *Practice*

Next problem is giving the children practice in the skills related to the use of information and problem solving. It is the part where the teacher provide a chance for the students to practice to use the skill and to know the utilization of these skills, because it turns out that however often the teacher may set forth general ideas, unless the student has an opportunity to use them he is not going to be very effective in their use.

5) *The “self-loop” problem*

The children, in learning in school settings, will frequently do kind of things which he is not able to describe to themselves. Psychologists see this all the time in new studies,

children who are able to do many kinds of things, for example, to handle a balance mean quite adequately by putting rings on nails on both sides of a fulcrum and getting quite interesting balances, but are not able to say it to themselves and convert this fact into a compact notion which they could hold in mind.

6) *Capacity for handling information flow*

The sixth problem involves the nature of teacher and students capacity for handling information flow manageably so that it can be used in problem solving.

Furthermore, Burner in Weible (2011:10) summarizes the ideas of discovery learning as (a) presented in a piecemeal fashion with limited context, (b) interpreted beyond their intended scope, (c) generalized into a practitioners' application, and (d) were later modified and subdued by their originator in favor of a new interpretation. However, as is also true of many of the other theories, the generalized educational practitioner's application of the original ideas is of considerable influence in both the classroom and the design of instruction.

c. Teaching News Item through Discovery Learning to Enhance Students' Language Awareness

In English as foreign language teaching classroom, discovery learning can be applied into learning the genre of the text. One of genres of the text that learned by the secondary school students in Indonesia is news Item. News item text can be taught through this method. The learner will try to find out what is the news item text through their own way in Discovery learning. It can be done through three step, namely pre-teaching, whilst teaching and post teaching.

1) *Pre-Teaching*

The teacher can begin discovery learning by presenting students with a scenario that has a problem that they can solve or giving a stimulus for the learners. Stimulus is given during the observation activity where the students observe the facts or phenomena in a way of seeing, hearing, reading, or listening. Facts are provided starting from the simple to the facts or phenomena that caused controversy.

In this case, the teacher provides several hot issues that happen in their environment. Unlike the traditional method where the teacher has already provide the students with the text of news item, through discovery learning the students are stimulate to find the news on their own. The project can be based on the hot issues that happen in Indonesia or in their school environment only. A teacher should start the discovery learning process with relevant questions that relate to a learners' context and experience. This will lead learners' to active involvement in a learning session. Thus learners intrigued to find out more about the fact or phenomenon by reading from various sources or question.

Additionally, in learning activities teacher can begin by asking the question, suggestion for some resources, and other learning activities that lead to the preparation of problem solving. Stimulation at this stage serves to provide the conditions of learning interactions that can develop and assist students in exploring materials. In this case questioning is the best way to provide stimulation because asking questions can expose learners to the internal conditions that encourage exploration. Thus, teacher must master the techniques of giving a stimulus to students so as to enable the goal to explore the learners can be achieved.

2) *Whilst-Teaching*

After identifying the teachable moment and stimulation step, then the teacher guides the student by presenting examples, non-examples and learning materials. The teacher give an opportunity to students to identify as many as possible agendas of issues relevant to the lesson material , then one of them is selected and formulated in the form of hypotheses (temporary answer to the question of the problem), in this case the students has to formulate the answer for what news item text is. Meanwhile, according to selected problems that subsequently must be formulated in

the form of a question, or hypothesis, the statement as a temporary answer to questions, give learners the opportunity to identify and analyze the problem that they face, is a useful technique in building learners so that they are accustomed to find a problem.

Discovery learning is inductive reasoning in which the learner is guided by a set of predefined learning procedures. The question and answer session with examples and learning resources will be continued until the learner discovers interrelationships and general principles in the subject matter. The learner will formulate an appropriate hypothesis and test it during the inquiry session. This phase is the key of discovery learning. The process of discovery is not simply accepting a teachers' idea or explanation. It is an active knowledge construction process in which the learner devises strategies for searching and finding the regularities and relationships in the subject matter. As Bruner in Chambers, Thiekotter and Chambers (2013:120) mention discovery is the process of rearranging or transforming evidence in such a way that one is enabled to go beyond the evidence. So, through this step, the learner will try to find out what is the news item, what is the social purpose of the news item, what is the generic structure of a news item and what is language features of a news item text.

3) Post-Teaching

During the exploration, teacher provides an opportunity for learners to gather as much information that is relevant to prove the truth of the hypothesis. In this case information that collected related to what is news item. In this stage, the information is used to answer the question or prove the truth of the hypothesis, thus learners are given the opportunity to collect various relevant information, reading literatures, watching the objects, interviews with informants, conduct their own trials and so on. In this active learning the learner will find something related to the problems that they faced, thereby inadvertently connecting learners problems with existing knowledge.

The last phase of discovery learning is to apply the lesson learned to learners' practical situations. Learning is significant when it is transferred to another situation. The teacher should encourage students to solve a problem by using strategies and principles that the learner learned during the discovery learning session.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, language awareness plays an important role on learners' language acquisition, especially for multilingual students such as in West Sumatera. Language awareness deals with explicit knowledge about language. How students work with acquired language and new language such as English as foreign language is an important issue to be concerned. Regarding to awareness of language there are cognitive aspects of language awareness, namely explicit learning and consciousness which both really important to be considered in developing student's awareness of the use of language. Developing students' language awareness can be done though discovery learning. It is a learning situation in which the principal content of what is to be learned is not given but must be independently discovered by the student. The students have a role in their own learning and developing their creativity as they work on problems but still under teacher's control. There six based problems in discovery learning which are attitude, compatibility, activation, practice, the "self-loop" problem and capacity for handling information flow, though this six base problem it is aimed that the children or learner not only to learn the material that is presented in a school setting, but to learn it in such a way that he can use the information in problem solving. In English language teaching, discovery learning can be applied in teaching genre of text such as news item. The teacher guide the students to find out what is news item is by the students' way. The teacher provides an opportunity for the students which enable them to work on problem. The discovery learning in teaching news item text can be done through three basic steps in teaching; pre teaching, whilst teaching and post teaching.

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