

A REFLECTION OF TEACHER'S AFFECTIVE ELEMENT TO LOWER ADULT LEARNERS' AFFECTIVE FILTER AND ENCOURAGE INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Vita Kusumastuti

Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia
VITA.202200010006@student.atmajaya.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This paper is a reflective study of how teachers' positive affective element affects the way students react to the lessons during my observation period on online English classes for teachers. The classes were set to prepare English teachers for proficiency exams. Hence, the students were English teachers (participants) and the teachers were expatriate English teachers (facilitators). I found observing these classes to be interesting mainly because the subjects were English teachers. Preparing English teachers for an English exam is not an easy task, especially when the teachers have been teaching for over a decade. Many viewed being tested as being doubted on their expertise and thus, showed reluctance to participate in the learning process. This corroborates earlier research that claimed being a facilitator for disinclined and demotivated participants could be emotionally draining (Kyriacou, 2000, as cited in Abu-Rmaileh, 2020).

The course was set based on a predetermined syllabus to meet the needs for exam readiness; and the proficiency of the participants was significantly lower than expectation. This was in contrast to Krashen and Terrel's Natural Approach (1983), founded on the principle that involving learners in meaningful communicative and interactive activities at the suitable complexity level is the foundation of a language learning, compared to teaching the predetermined materials. This is probably why the classes did not quite yield the expected outcome for the participants.

This reflective study is based on live observation report, reflective journals that I wrote while observing the classes, and interview with participants. There were 5 lessons with two facilitators who are both expatriate English teachers that the participants specifically requested. Each class lasted for 2 to 3 hours. I concentrated my reflection on the affective element shown by the facilitators in the classes. The facilitators demonstrated different approaches in their teaching which then resulted in different outcomes.

Keywords: *Adult learners, Affective element, reflective study*

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini adalah penelitian reflektif pada bagaimana elemen afektif yang positif dari guru mempengaruhi reaksi siswa pada proses pembelajaran. Pembelajaran didesain dalam bentuk pelatihan untuk mempersiapkan guru Bahasa Inggris menghadapi tes kemampuan Bahasa Inggris berstandar internasional. Oleh karena itu, peserta didik disini adalah guru Bahasa Inggris (peserta) dan gurunya adalah guru Bahasa Inggris ekspatriat (fasilitator). Saya tertarik untuk mempelajari lebih lanjut tentang kelas ini karena subyek yang belajar adalah guru Bahasa Inggris. Mempersiapkan guru Bahasa Inggris untuk tes kemampuan Bahasa Inggris bukanlah tugas yang mudah, terutama jika guru yang bersangkutan merupakan guru senior yang telah mengajar lebih dari satu dekade. Banyak dari mereka yang menganggap diuji kemampuan itu sama dengan diragukan kemampuannya, dan oleh karena itu cukup banyak peserta yang terlihat tidak antusias mengikuti proses pembelajaran. Hal ini didukung oleh pernyataan Kyriacou (2000), bahwa menjadi fasilitator bagi peserta yang tidak antusias dan tidak termotivasi bisa melelahkan secara emosional (Kyriacou, 2000, pada tulisan Abu-Rmaileh, 2020).

Pelatihan diatas dilakukan berdasarkan silabus yang sudah ditentukan dengan tujuan untuk memastikan peserta mendapatkan persiapan sebelum tes kemampuan; dan kemampuan peserta pelatihan memang cukup jauh dibawah ekspektasi. Hal ini bertolak belakang dengan "Pendekatan Natural" oleh Krashen dan Terrel (1983), yang mengutarakan sebuah prinsip dimana melibatkan peserta didik didalam komunikasi yang bermakna dan aktifitas interaktif pada level kemampuan mereka adalah dasar dari pembelajaran Bahasa, dan bukan dengan materi yang sudah dipersiapkan sebelumnya. Kenyataan ini bisa menjadi salah satu penyebab pelatihan tidak membuahkan hasil seperti yang diharapkan dari peserta.

Penelitian reflektif ini didasarkan hasil observasi langsung, jurnal reflektif yang ditulis selama observasi, dan wawancara dengan peserta. Ada 5 (lima) sesi dengan dua fasilitator yang keduanya merupakan guru Bahasa Inggris ekspatriat yang diminta oleh para peserta sendiri. Setiap sesi berlangsung 2-3 jam. Penelitian ini fokus pada elemen afektif yang diperlihatkan oleh para fasilitator dikelas. Para fasilitator mendemonstrasikan pendekatan mengajar yang berbeda, sehingga hasil yang didapatkan juga berbeda.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, education institutions regularly hold standardizations and certification for their teachers. The methods range from in-house training, supervision, monitoring, to mastery tests. Thus, for English

teachers in one of private educational institutions in Jakarta, taking a proficiency test becomes a part of the institution's quality control. Those who have passed the test are regarded as qualified and those who have not should undergo a series of English training to prepare them for the test. The training is intended to improve the English teachers' capacity, hence, improving their teaching quality. Mathew et al. (2017) argue that teacher education is crucial to reshape and increase the quality of education in any country. They further explain that teacher trainer has become more and more popular globally (p. 126).

Having to take an exam in their respective field could be daunting enough for these English teachers, for it might indicate that their expertise is being questioned. After all, teachers are more used to the role of examiners rather than examinees. So when the training series start, they tend to show reluctance and anxiety in their new role as 'learners'. '(T)esting, communication apprehension, and peer evaluation are the three main sources of anxiety' (Horwitz et al., 1986, as cited in Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009). This is important to note because, as noted by Vuilleumier and Huang (2009), 'increasing evidence from both psychology and neuroscience now clearly indicate that emotion and cognition do not operate entirely separately but reciprocally influence each other' (p.148). Thus, to make learning successful, learners' negative emotions must be addressed.

Teaching teachers has its challenges, namely, they are experienced in teaching, they have attended a number of trainings and seminars, and they have the tendency to be very critical towards others' teaching methods. These factors may manifest in awkwardness, hesitations, discomfort and even a defensive behavior if the lesson and the facilitator do not live up to their expectation. When this happens, reinforcing proactivity in the learning activities may be challenging. In the training, the facilitators should be able to put themselves as teachers and see the English teachers as participants. In order to prepare the facilitators, a meeting was conducted to make sure that the training goal, materials and timeline were understood. The facilitators were given freedom to plan their lesson and choose their teaching media after being briefed on the overall proficiency of the participants. Participants were put in classes based on their initial English proficiency. It is believed that one's proficiency of a second language affects their learning methods (Mills & Plonsky, 2007, p. 536). Thus, it was hoped that the facilitators were able to plan their lesson accordingly.

My role was as one of the observers in the training. An observer's task was to observe the lesson and the facilitator by filling out the rubrics. So I gather some data from my peer observers' findings to get richer point of view. In addition to that, I also wrote reflective journals. In my reflective journal I paid attention to the three affective factors; motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Krashen (1982) argued that those factors have direct influence towards the achievement of the learners not the learning directly. Furthermore, in his Affective Filter hypothesis, Krashen mentioned that when a learner with weaker attitude towards the three factors will develop higher affective filter and will not look for inputs. In addition to that, when the inputs are present, they will not be able to be absorbed optimally (p. 31). I would like to study if the effort put by the facilitators could decrease the affective filters of the participants, and thus, promote a better acquirement of the learning. Lastly, I interviewed some of the training participants to get their personal insights of the training series.

METHOD

For this paper, a qualitative research approach is used as it is relevant to the research on social affairs (Flick, 2014, p.17). This reflection is written based on observation report by observation team, journals that I wrote during my observations, and the reflective narrative interview with the participants. The class that I observed was a class of 8 senior teachers whose experience in English teaching range from 17 to 28 years and who had previously failed to pass the exam. The facilitators of the class were LA, an English native speaker teacher and PM, a non-English native speaker expatriate teacher.

The observation report and the journals recorded the interaction between the facilitator and participants happening in 5 sessions in January 2021. Each session lasted for 3 hours with 30 minutes break in between. The observation report was based on observation checklist from live observation. I wrote journals on my observations from the videos of the lessons, which I could replay as many times as necessary to get the details that I needed. As mentioned by Reynolds (2011), '(r)reflection involves thinking about past or ongoing experience of events, situations or actions so as to make sense of them, potentially with a view to informing future choices, decisions or actions.'

For the interview, I did a homogenous sampling by taking 4 out of 8 participants in the class who are all High School English teachers. High School English teachers are often said to have an advantage when it comes to taking proficiency exam compared to those who are teaching the lower grades as they

use higher level books with more complex materials in their teaching. The questions I asked were open ended. As suggested by Kramp (2004) stories help people to put a meaning to life experience, engraving memories, reflecting, linking past experience to the present, and prepare us to pave the future (p. 107). But during the interview, I wanted to emphasize on the narrative inquiry so that it could be more than just stories, but a meaningful life experience that the teachers could really reflect on (Clandinin, D.J., Pushor, D., & Orr, A.M., 2007, p. 21).

REFLECTIVE POINTS

Akbari's introduces 5 elements to reflect on; practical, cognitive, affective, meta-cognitive, and critical elements (Akbari, 2007, as cited in Kazemi, Bazregazadeh, & Firoozi, 2016, p. 994). However, this study will take on the affective element with an emphasis on the affective element applied by the facilitators and their effect to the participants. Akbari et al. (2010) states that affective element assists teachers to reflect on the way their students learn, and the students' emotional states expressed in the classroom. In addition, this element addresses the students' cultural background, linguistics entry behavior, their existing knowledge and ability, their pursuits, and their aptness to complete assignments (Zeichner and Liston, 1994). This element is investigated in the observation report, journal and interview.

1. Live Observation Report

During live observation, observers filled out observation rubric, mainly to give feedback on the facilitator's readiness to deliver the materials and whether the goal of the lesson in each meeting was met. The observation rubric was used to give feedback to the facilitator after each lesson. In the rubric, however, very little space was given for the observers to focus on the facilitator's affective element. Both facilitators were present each time the observation feedback was given. Most of the feedback was more on the technical side of the training, but some points related to affective element were noted.

First facilitator, LA, has been teaching for more than 15 years in Indonesia. He told the observers that he was open for suggestion. However, when he was given feedback on how he should improve his approach towards the teachers before asking them to do any task from the first observation, for example by giving enough warm up activities to set learning context, he subtly refused by pointing out that the participants were English teachers. He was nuancing that the participants should have known their purpose and should have found their motivation to follow the training without having him encouraging them. He then continued to skip warm up activities. Furthermore, when he was given feedback to slow down his speech a bit so that the participants could understand him better, he did not seem to be willing to do it until the third meeting after 2 feedback sessions with observers. On the third meeting, for example, LA softly reminded the participants to mute themselves if they were not speaking so that their background noises did not disturb the class audio. It was a gesture that helped the class to be more comfortable for the lesson.

The other facilitator, PM, introduced himself as non-native English teacher and actually conducted an ice breaking activity by addressing participants' personal goals. His introduction seemed to lift the participants' confidence as if the facilitator was one of them and could understand their situation. PM had his first class after the first facilitator's, LA's, session. Clearly, PM took the feedback delivered for AL into his own consideration in planning his lesson and it did work.

It is worth to note that in the observation report, the observers highlighted the lack of preparation in LA's class compared to PM's.

2. Reflective Journal

In writing my reflective journal, I concentrated on the affective element more, especially on participants' motivation, self-confidence and anxiety and how the affective element displayed by the facilitators affecting those. Because in the observation rubric, I could only point out according the scales but I could not write down what I had observed. Affective element became interesting to me since I had two very different facilitators when it comes to their affective element in their teaching.

The first facilitator, LA, seemed to be indifferent towards the participants mental wellbeing, for example, when they expressed their concerns and worries, he did not take the opportunity to motivate the participants. He would just move on to the next part of the training focusing on the accomplishment of the training materials. Moreover, when the first 3 participants from 8 failed to answer the same question, the facilitator should have reflected on it and even took a detour to re-explain it. But again, he seemed to concentrate more on the quantity of the learning rather than the quality. Other instances include the fact

that he skipped warm-up activities, hardly asked the participants if they did not understand the task and often spoke too fast leaving the participants in confusion. In my reflections, I even questioned if the facilitator indeed planned the lesson for it seemed a bit unorganized. The facilitator's teaching strategy seemed to increase the participants' affective filter, resulting a frequent misunderstanding on the lesson that caused the participants to fail performing the tasks.

The second facilitator, PM, had a different affective strategy. He was all for building motivation and self-confident, and eliminating participants' anxiety. PM invested time to scaffold participants' prior knowledge before assigning task. PM also frequently assigned group works which the participants seemed to enjoy since that meant they could collaborate with their peers. Furthermore, PM asked reflective questions which in my observations were welcomed by the participants as they could express their opinion on the learning activity. From the class management and teaching strategy that I wrote on the last two sessions, it can be concluded that the participants enjoyed the learning process because of the affective element mentioned above used by the facilitator.

3. Interview

All of the participants agree that both facilitators tried their best to help them achieve the goal of the training. They pointed out that they did struggle throughout the training as they thought that the materials were unsuitable for them. One of the participants said that the materials were 1 level higher than the level that they had to achieve.

Some participants claimed that the schedule of the training really affected their performance as the class was held during weekdays in between their teaching schedule. They also mentioned about their insecurities of failing the first attempts to pass the exam.

The participants also mentioned that with LA, they sometimes felt as if the facilitator was not ready with the lesson. And it confused them.

REFLECTION ANALYSIS

I wrote my impressions on the interaction details with examples in my journals to support my reflection. For example, as recorded in the journal, although the participants demanded expatriate English teachers, or better yet an English native-speaker teacher, to assist them in the learning process, some of them struggled to understand when the native facilitator explained the lesson. The participant would then proceed to ask the teacher to slow down, and occasionally asked the teacher to paraphrase the terminology. Geers and Lassiter (2002) said that even though the hope which one presents in a particular scenario can be precise, one frequently experiences things differently (p.1026). The fact that their expectation was not met, could be a factor that affected the participants' performance as well.

The participants were subjects to training because they had not passed the standard bar. The fact alone should have given a hint to the facilitator on how to plan their approach. It would be great if the facilitator could actually give some encouragements instead of sweeping the issue under the rug.

From the observation report, reflective journal and interview with the participants, it seems that the first facilitator, LA, emphasized on "correctness" most of the time. The participants, who felt the needs to ace the exam preparation endured the class by trying to keep up with the materials. During my observation, however, I could sense the tension and uneasiness in the class from the way the continuously failed to perform simple task like 'talk about your hobby'. The second facilitator, PM, who actually took time to introduce himself, the goal(s) of the training for the day (Graves, 2008) and get to know the teachers, was more successful in engaging with the participants. I could see how the atmosphere was improving. It was not long until the participants actually felt comfortable to be active in the training for example when the facilitator put them into groups, they actually work together with enthusiasm. Furthermore, the facilitator seemed to be quite expressive in his interest in the teachers' personal progress and, even, personal lives. It was evident that he made attempts to build a personal relationship with the teachers. It did help by making the teachers opening up about their worries. And when the facilitator gave pep talks, the teachers really accepted those as assurance.

My reflection on affective element demonstrated by the facilitator of the training gave me an insight that learning is not always about achieving the goal. It was more to the principles that a facilitator or teacher applied to pursue the learning goal that includes several methods. First, treating students as co-workers may give them sense of equality (Hismanoglu, 2010), and thus, building their confidence. Second, giving them clear understanding on the main objective and direct them to fully comprehend it mean more than just delivering the materials. As previously discussed in the reflection analysis, acquiring language needs more than understanding the material. It requires readiness and low affective filter. Next,

using multimodalities, such as pictures, clips, and listening audio, may help stimulate curiosity. Lastly, utilizing pair works and group works to promote inclusivity and avoid boredom. All of those can lower their affective filter and may then promote better learning outcome (Krashen, 1982, p. 30-31).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As an observer, I would like to help facilitators to reflect on their teaching. Some of the suggested approaches to reinforce reflections are by observing classrooms and writing journal (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Mann (2005) stated that a number of studies have demonstrated that more reflective teachers are better able to monitor, make real-time decisions and respond to the changing needs of learners than less reflective teachers (as cited in Gunn, 2010). I believe that what I have observed and put in journals can assist teachers in giving proper responses to the student's necessities.

In the observation rubric, for example, there was a part where observers needed to check if the objective of the lesson was fulfilled. However, in days when the chemistry between the facilitator and the participants was off, such as when the facilitator demanded constant “correctness” from the participants or when the facilitator skipped the warm-up activity and dived in the materials while expecting the participants to be all ready when they were not, it affected the flow of the lesson and the achievement of the objective of the lesson. The participants’ readiness affected their affective filter. When they were not ready for activity but were ‘forced’ to jump it, it increases their affective filter. Krashen (1982) argued although learners may understand the content, high affective filter may cause the brain part in charge of language acquisition fail to absorb input. Furthermore, it requires a save condition for learners to learn language comfortably and that learners’ emotional state might determine their readiness for comprehensible input (p.31). I began to realize the significance of spending time to build a conducive learning atmosphere to ensure participants or students’ readiness for a learning activity. Or else, all the activity planned might be conducted but may not be transferred well to the learners.

For further study, it could be a great addition to teachers’ reflective point to learn if teachers’ readiness for a class also affects their affective element and if a non-English native speaker teacher can actually assist non-English native speaker learners better than the English native speaker teacher.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Complete Name : Vita Kusumastuti
Institution : Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia
Education : S2 ongoing (MLTBI)
Research Interests: Sociolinguistics and EFL