MANAGEMENT OF INTERACTION IN EFL CLASSES TO IMPROVE THE STUDENTS' INTERACTION SKILL IN TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

Hanafi*[1]

Abstrak: Kesuksesan siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris (EFL) selalu ditandai dengan meningkatnya kemampuan mereka dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam berkomunikasi. Pada proses belajar tersebut, peranan guru amatlah dominan dalam menentukan kesuksesan belajar bahasa Inggris terutama dalam berkomunikasi lisan dan melakukan komunikasi dalam proses belajar mengajar. Artikel ini membahas tentang faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi suksesnya interaksi, beberapa kendala yang perlu ditangani, dan manajemen interaksi di kelas dalam rangka mensukseskan tujuan belajar bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: EFL (English as a foreign language), interaksi,

manajemen interaksi.

Introduction

Learning English is identical with learning to speak English. That is a stereotype used in many education institutions in Indonesia. That typecast is not absolutely correct, but some symptoms seem support it. A student with sufficient knowledge of English, but having low capability to speak English is usually regarded as having low competence in English. On the contrary, someone whose limited knowledge of English, but having ability to speak fluently will be regarded as having "good English", since the most important thing is communication.

Communication skills especially ability to speak or make conversation is very important to develop in English teaching learning process. As stated by Ur (1996:20), among the 4 language skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important aspect in

communication. But we still find some problem related to speaking in our education institution in Indonesia. During teaching learning process in English classes, some teachers find difficulties to make the students active in expressing their idea in the class as well as making conversation in English. It seems that they feel ashamed to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes in expressing their idea. A teacher should work hard to make the student speak during class interaction.

Related to the improvement of the students' skill in using English, it is important that teachers facilitate the use of English as a communication tool. For real communication to take place, students need to interact with someone else, whether this is with the teacher, with other students in the classroom, or with an 'unseen' audience, such as when they are writing a letter to someone. How 'real' this communication is will depend very much on the type of activities which the students are asked to perform (Lucantoni, 2002: 15).

One of the ways to reach the teaching learning process in the class is having good classroom management. As stated by Stevick (1980:4), success in learning a language depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analysis, and more on inside and between people in the classroom. The statement focuses that the class condition has more role to make the teaching learning process success. Of course, to reach a good condition, a teacher should have a good ability to manage class condition.

Classroom management refers to the way teachers organize what goes on in the classroom (Gebhard, 2000, 69). As the most powerful person, a teacher has a power to influence the teaching learning process in a class. He can manage what is going on in the class. The interaction in the class is created from combination of some related factors such as how much the teacher talks, what the teacher says, the teacher's questioning behaviors, and how the teacher gives instruction, keeps the students on task and makes language comprehensible. The purpose of managing the class is to make a situation conducive to interacting in meaningful ways.

Related to managing class, a teacher should be creative to support and to motivate the students to improve their skills in communication. The following part will describe how to implement classroom management in ESL class since making a good

management in EFL classes seems to be one of the alternatives to reach the purpose of learning English.

Teaching English as Foreign Language

Teaching English as foreign language means teaching English as a language studied by people who live in place where English is not the first language of the people who live in the country such as Italy, Saudi Arabia, Korea, and Indonesia.

Teaching English as foreign language involves communicative interaction between a teacher and the students. Rivers (1987:14) states that Language learning and teaching can be an exciting and refreshing interval in the day for students and teacher. There are so many possible ways of stimulating communicative interaction. However, one still finds classrooms where language learning is a tedious, dry-as-dust process, devoid of contact with the real world in which language use is as natural as breathing.

In building a good communicative interaction in EFL classes, we should consider some important matters. The important matters, as they are proposed by Gebhard (2000:49) are 1) the way EFL teachers provide opportunities for students to interact in English, 2) the factors make an interactive classroom interactive, 3) the experiences the EFL students bring to the interactive classroom, 4) the role of native and near-native English-speaking EFL teachers expected to play, and 5) the problems some EFL teachers face when teaching English as interaction among people.

Providing Opportunities for Students to Interact in English

Related to *the way EFL teachers provide opportunities* for students to interact in English, we still find some EFL classes, which are taught in fairly teacher centered. Interaction is dominated by the teachers who, for example, give lengthy explanation and lectures, drills repetitively, asks the majority of the questions, and makes judgment about the students' answers. However, other EFL teachers see value in getting students involved in interaction in English. In this section, based on a framework provided by Littlewood (1981), the writer explains how to get students involved in interacting in English.

Some teachers who aim at having an interactive classroom begin lessons with "precommunicative activities." used primarily with beginner and intermediate level students. The purpose of precommunicative activities is for the teacher to isolate specific elements of knowledge or skill that comprise communicative ability and to give students opportunities to practice them without having to fully engage in communicating meaning. There are two types of precommunicative activities: structural and quasi-communicative. Structural activities focus on the grammar and lexicon (vocabulary) of English, while quasi-communicative activities focus on how the language is used to communicate meaning. Quasi-communicative activities are often in the form of dialogues or relatively simple activities in which students interact under highly controlled conditions. (Gebhard, 2000: 50).

The Factors Make an Interactive Classroom Interactive

Talking about *the factors make an interactive classroom interactive*, we have to consider the interactive principles. A class can be interactive when it fulfills the interactive principles. Brown (2001:166) states that there are some interactive principles to be considered in making class interactive. They are automaticity, intrinsic motivation, strategic investment, risk-taking, the language-culture connection, interlanguage, and communicative competence.

Automaticity: True human interaction is best accomplished when focal attention is on meanings and messages and not on grammar and other linguistic forms. Learners are thus freed from keeping language in a controlled mode and can more easily proceed to automatic modes of processing.

Intrinsic motivation: As students become engaged with each other in speech acts of fulfillment and self-actualization, their deepest drives are satisfied. And as they more fully appreciate their own competence to use language, they can develop a system of self-reward.

Strategic Investment: Interaction requires the use of strategic language competence both to make certain decisions on how to say or write or interpret language, and to make repairs when communication pathways are blocked. The spontaneity of

interactive discourse requires judicious use of numerous strategies for production and comprehension.

Risk-taking: Interaction requires the risk of failing to produce intended meaning, of failing to interpret intended meaning (on the part of someone else), of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected. The rewards, of course, are great and worth the risks.

The language-culture connection: The cultural loading of interactive speech as well as writing requires that interlocutors be thoroughly versed in the cultural nuances of language.

Interlanguage: The complexity of interaction entails a long developmental process of acquisition. Numerous errors of production and comprehension will be a part of this development. And the role of teacher feedback is crucial to the developmental process.

Communicative competence: All of the elements of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, and strategic) are involved in human interaction. All aspects must work together for successful communication to take place.

Furthermore, Gebhard (2000:52) states that there are at least five closely related factors that can contribute to making interactive classroom interactive. One is reducing the central (and traditional) position of the teacher. This does not mean that we teachers have to give up control of the class. The teacher can maintain control of what goes on in the classroom while still giving freedom to the students to initiate interaction among themselves and with the teacher.

Factors contributing to making classrooms interactive Gebhard (2000:53) include:

- Reduction in the centrality of the teacher
- An appreciation for the uniqueness of individuals
- Chances for students to express themselves in meaningful ways
- Opportunities for students to negotiate meaning with each other and the teacher.
- Choices, both in relation to what students say and how they say it.

The Experiences the EFL Students Bring to the Interactive Classroom

The students' experiences play important role in making the class interactive. Although approaches to teaching English are changing, it is safe to say that many students' language-learning experiences are relatively traditional in nature. In some schools, English is treated like an academic subject, like history or geography, and considerable emphasis is placed on learning to read and translate. During class, students read orally, repeat after the teacher, do grammar drills, listen to grammar explanations given in the teacher's native language, and generally, study about language, often forgets to the use this language has to communicate meaning. Some students experience a functional curriculum in which they study about and practice the functions of language—for example, how to make a request, ask for permission, ask for information, make a suggestion, complain about something, agree disagree, and so on. Usually, the class follows a text, and with some teachers, students practice using the functions of language to express themselves through dialogue practice, role-plays, and other activities. However, generally most of the students who enter the classrooms do not have much experience interacting with native speakers of English or much ability in communicating in English.

The Role of Native and Near-Native English-Speaking EFL Teachers Expected to Play

The role of native and near-native English-speaking EFL teachers is also important in supporting the success of class interaction. As it is stated in the previous part, a teacher should know what their roles are and when the suitable time to apply them is. Teaching is multifaceted, and much of the complexity involves how to assume roles that capitalize our abilities in English while we at the same time take on roles that contribute to creating interaction in the classroom that is meaningful for both teacher and students. Related to the matter, Gebhard (2000:56) addresses two sets of role that are regarded very essential in building a good teaching learning interaction. They are 1) use of English language Abilities, which includes language authority, cultural information, and model English teacher; 2) use of ability to create meaningful

interaction, which includes needs assessor, classroom manager, text adaptor, and entertainer. When a teacher is success in imple-menting both roles, of course, the learning atmosphere will be good and the class will be success in making a good class interaction.

The Problems Some EFL Teachers Face when Teaching English as Interaction among People

Problems Some EFL Teachers Face when Teaching English must be wisely understood by the teachers so that they can easily overcome them. In general the teachers' problems, as stated by Gebhard (2000:60) are the "*bandwagon"* problem*,* the *"overly anxious"* problem*,* and the *"engagement"* problem.

The "*bandwagon "* problem happens when the teacher discovers a new exciting method and accepts this way of teaching with great enthusiasm as the best way to teach. In this case the teacher just "take" the newly method of teaching. The danger of bandwagon is that if we blindly follow a certain way of teaching because it is said to be the best way to teach, we become impervious to other possibility. Bandwagon provides the teacher with confidence, company, and technique, but they do not liberate us to be able to make our own informed teaching decision.

The *"overly anxious" problem* happens when some students have such high levels of anxiety that they cannot take advantage of opportunities to learn English. Tom Scovel (1978:135) defines anxiety as "a state of apprehension, a vague fear." Brown (1987:107) adds "It is associated with feelings of uneasiness, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry." There are some reasons for anxiety. Some of the factors that could raise the level of anxiety are inability to pronounce strange sounds and words, not knowing the meaning of words or sentences, inability to understand and answer questions, reputation of the language class as a place for failure or criticism, not knowing or understanding course goals or requirements, testing especially oral testing, previous unsuccessful language-learning attempts, and encountering different cultural values and behaviors (Gebhard, 2000:61). If students in our classes have high degrees of anxiety that are debilitating them, there are things we can possibly do to reduce their anxious feelings. Students who have high levels of anxiety about being in an EFL or ESL

classroom do not need criticism on their language performance. Rather than being critical, we can show understanding. To do this, when a student expresses an idea, we can use an "understanding response" by really listening to the student and paraphrasing back to the student what he or she said. Such paraphrasing not only can provide a way for the student to reflect on his or her own language in a noncritical way but can also improve understanding. When we consistently and sincerely work at trying to understand the students' meaning without expressing verbal or nonverbal judgment of the language used by the student, a positive, trusting relationship between the student and teacher can develop, one that also reduces anxiety about being in a language classroom.

The *"engagement" problem* happens when the teacher is not fully committed to teaching English as interaction, and will not fully engage in interacting with the students or arranging activities for them to use English as a means of communication in the classroom. In teaching-learning process, it requires that the teacher yield to the students so that they feel free to interact with the teacher and each other. However, this is not necessarily easy for some teachers. As Rivers (1987:9) says, "Never having experienced an interactive classroom, teachers are afraid it will be chaotic and hesitate to try" Adding to this problem are the students' attitudes. Students quite often come to classrooms with little experience in initiating and participating in interaction in English. As such, they will also hesitate to interact, afraid that things will become out of control, frenzied, and embarrassing. To avoid this engagement problem, it is our responsibility, as leaders, to provide the kind of atmosphere that is conducive to interaction. As teachers, we need to show emotional maturity, sensitivity to the students' feelings, and a perceptiveness and commitment that interaction in English is not only appropriate but also expected and necessary for the students if they want to learn to communicate in English. As Rivers (1987:10) says, "When a teacher demonstrates such qualities, students lose their fear of embarrassment and are willing to try to express themselves."

The Management of Interaction in the Classroom

Interaction is the heart of communication, and communication itself, whether it is oral or written, is the central goal of the

foreign language learning. In order to achieve that goal, the learners or the students need to cooperate and interact among themselves, between them and the teacher, or between them and somebody else who are aware of language learning. In short, communication is derived from interaction since in communication there must be interaction between people who have something to share (Rivers, 1987).

Classroom interaction will be better when it has a good classroom management. Even the success of learning a language depends *less* on materials, techniques, and linguistic analysis, and *more* on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom (Stevic, 1980:4). Classroom management refers to the way teachers organize what goes on in the classroom. As the most powerful person in the classroom, the teacher has the authority to influence the kind of interaction that goes on in the class, and this interaction is created from a combination of many related factors. It includes such factors as how much the teacher talks and what the teacher says; the teacher's questioning behaviors; and how the teacher gives instructions, keeps students on task, and makes language comprehensible to the students.(Gebhard, 2000:69). The goal of classroom management is to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to interacting in English in meaningful ways. It is through meaningful interaction that students can make progress in learning English.

Classroom Management to Create Students Opportunity to Interact in English

Discussing classroom management in this part focuses on how teachers manage classroom teaching so that students have opportunity to interact in English in meaningful ways. There are some important aspects in classroom management namely; *teacher talks, teacher's questions, feedback on learners' performances, setting up classroom activities, giving instruction, and making language comprehensible* (Nunan,1991:189-198), (Gebhard, 2000:69-79).

Teacher-talk is of crucial importance in EFL or ESL classes. It is important not only for the organization and management of the classroom but also for the process of acquisition. In terms of the

organization and management of the classroom, teacher-talk is important because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail to implement their teaching plans. While in terms of the process of acquisition, teacher-talk is important since it is regarded as the major source of comprehensible target language input the student is likely to receive (Nunan, 1991:189). This is because the teacher seems to be the most dominant person in language learning classroom. It is therefore his/her speech or talk is finally considered as the main source of input in language learning classroom, in this case is in EFL classes.

Teacher questions have been the focus of research attention in both content classrooms (classrooms devoted to teaching science, mathematics, geography, etc.) and language classrooms for many years (Gerot 1989) in Nunan (1991:192). Teachers ask a lot of questions. It seems impossible that teachers teach the students without asking any question at all. It stands to reason that knowledge about questioning behaviors can benefit teachers who want to provide chances for students to interact in English in meaningful ways. The way the teacher asks questions is determined by the purposes of asking the questions. The work of Barns (1975), Long and Sato (1983), and Fanselow (1987) have had a direct impact on the way we understand the purpose of teachers' questions. The kinds of question based on the purposes on the teachers' question can be seen on table following table.

Display Question	A question in which the teacher already knows the answer and wants the student to display knowledge ("What color is you shirt?")
Referential Question	A question in which the teacher does not know the answer. ("What is your favorite color?")
Comprehension Check	A question to find out if a student understands ("Do you understand?")
Confirmation Question	A question to verify what was said ("You said you got up at 6:00?")
Clarification Check	A question to further define or clarify ("Did you say you got up at 6:0 or 7:00?")

Adopted from Gebhard, 2000:71

The teacher has to be able to ask questions based on the need. If he can use it wisely, he will be able to increase the students' involvement in teaching-learning process well. Otherwise, if he falls in implementing the appropriate kinds of questions to the students, he will not able to gain his purpose to involve the students in teaching-learning process well.

   Feedback on Learners' Performance and instructing students are probably the two most commonly conceived classroom functions of teachers. In this section, we look at some of the managerial and pedagogical aspects of feedback to learners. Of the various ways in which feedback can be classified, one of the most frequent and simplest distinctions is between positive and negative feedback. For many years, behaviorists' inspired research has found that positive feedback is much more effective than negative feedback in changing pupil behavior. Positive feedback has two principal functions: to let students know that they have performed correctly, and to increase motivation through praise (Nunan, 1991:195). Much of the feedback provided by teachers often seems to be rather automatic, and its ultimate effect on the learners is doubtful. But, it is important that we develop an awareness, not only of the ways in which we provides feedback to the learners, but also we monitor who gets the feedback since each individual has different characteristic.

   Setting up Classroom Activities influence the students' desire to have a good interaction. To manage and promote interactive classrooms, we also need to know how to arrange a variety of classroom activities. We can select to have students work (1) alone, (2) in dyads, (3) in small groups, or (4) as a whole class. These arrangements imply that we have a great many choices as to the activities we can have students do in class. They can sit in a traditional seating arrangement or in a semicircle during teacher-class discussions or lectures, or they can stand up and walk around as they study (e.g., to memorize lines in a poem). Students can also move their chairs or select a comfortable spot to sit alone or in groups while working on a task. Likewise, they can sit face-to-face—for example, as they interview each other. They can sit back-to-back as they simulate a telephone conversation, across from each other as they practice a dialogue, in circles as they solve a problem or discuss an issue, or next to each other as they study a reading

selection, plan a party, or collaborate on a piece of writing. The point here is that we teachers do not have to limit the students to traditional seating. If our goal is to provide lots of chances for students to use English to communicate meaning, we need to feel free to create seating combinations that make this possible. Another aspect of setting up classroom activities is how we group students, and there are varieties of ways to do this. One way is to select students in advance of the class based on personality characteristics or abilities and experience. For example, shy students can be matched with other shy students or with talkative students, fluent students with other fluent students or with those who are not fluent. The way of forming groups can be one of the ways to reduce the students' anxiety about speaking in English and improve their involvement in class when it is done correctly.

   Giving instructions is another aspect of managing a classroom, and it is worth taking time to consider how we can make our instructions clear to the students and at the same time provide opportunities through the instructions for students to interact in meaningful ways. One way is to write the instructions on the board or show them on an overhead projector screen. Sometimes teachers create a doze activity from the instructions, leaving every fifth word blank. Students then complete the doze and at the same time process what it is they are to do during the next activity. Mother language activity is to give the instructions as a dictation. After giving the dictation, he has students correct each other by comparing their dictation with a written version.

   "Some ways to give instructions include:
1. Writing down instructions and giving them verbally
2. Giving instructions verbally and role-playing them; showing the students what they are to do
3. Having a student read the instructions, then having a student or two paraphrase these instructions to the class
4. Writing down the instructions, letting the students read them silently, then having them tell you what it is you expect from them
5. Giving instructions as a dictation, then having the students check each other's dictations
6. Miming the instructions as students guess and tell you what they are supposed to do

7. Whispering the instructions as students lean forward in their seat, having them repeat the instruction to the person next to them in whisper" (Gebhard, 2000:78)

Making language comprehensible to the students provides opportunities for meaningful interaction by. If the language used by the teacher or in materials is not comprehensible, students can lose interest, become anxious or frustrated, and sometimes go into a passive, non-attentive mood. As such, it makes sense to work at making language comprehensible, but how can this be done? Gebhard (2000:81) suggests three ways to make language comprehensible to students. They are; simplify speech, add mediums, and negotiate meaning.

Conclusion

In teaching-learning process in EFL classes, the role of teacher is undoubtedly important. A teacher is the central of teaching-learning process in classes. He can determine whether the teaching-learning process is success or not. To make the learning process success, a teacher should have a good management of interaction for the sake of helping the students to understand the messages they hear as well as making a good interaction in classes. In building a good communicative interaction in EFL classes, we should consider some important matters. The important matters, they are the way EFL teachers provide opportunities for students to interact in English, the factors make an interactive classroom interactive, the experiences the EFL students bring to the interactive classroom, the role of native and near-native English-speaking EFL teachers expected to play, and the problems some EFL teachers face when teaching English as interaction among people. Related to management of interaction there are some important aspects in classroom management the teachers should consider namely; teacher talks, teacher's questions, feedback on learners' performances, setting up classroom activities, giving instruction, and making language comprehensible.

REFERENCE

Nunan, D. 1991. *Language Teaching Methodology*. London: Prentice Hall International (UK), Ltd.

Ur, Penny. 1996. *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lucantoni, Peter. 2002. *Teaching and Assessing Skills in English as a Second Language: Professional Development for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, J. and Willis, D. (eds.). 1999. *Challenge and change in language teaching*. Heinemann

Rivers, W., 1987. *Interactive Language Teaching.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Swan, M. 1985. A critical look at the communicative approach (2). *ELT Journal*, *39*(2), 76-87.

Gebhard, G. Jerry. 2000. *Teaching English as Foreign or Second Language*; A self Development and Methodology Guide. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Littlewood, W. 1981. *Communicative Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, H. D. 1987. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall.

_____. 2001. Teaching by Principles: An Integrative Approach to Language Pedagogy (2nd Ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Scovel, *T. 1978.* "The Effect of Affect on Foreign Language Learning: A Review of Anxiety Research." *Language Learning 28:129-42.*

Stevick, E. W. 1980. *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Barns, D. 1975. *From Communication to Curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.