

Factors Supporting and Hindering the Learning of English as an Additional Language Experienced by a Female Indonesian Student

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates factors supporting and hindering a female Indonesian learner in learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). Data were taken through a semi-structured interview. Findings suggested that personal factors (motivation and learning style), and environmental factors (immersion in targeted language, the teacher's strategy and supporting English study club) have been classified as supporting factors of the participant in learning English. However, environmental factors, such as lack of supportive environment and learning anxiety, had contributed to hindering the participant in learning English. Suggested pedagogic implication, such as utilizing communicative method and promoting a sense of self-direction are offered at the end of this study.

Keywords: Learning English, factors supporting, factors hindering, English as an Additional Language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) can be tricky and challenging for numerous English Language Learners (ELLs). Several aspects influence how ELLs master their process of learning English. These factors are varied and different from one learner to another. The participant in this study is from English Department background and she has been dealing with teaching and learning English for more than nineteen years. She also has several years experience in learning English in two different English speaking countries; England and Australia. Geared by the fact that the participant's story in learning English, there are several factors that supporting and hindering the participant in learning English. This paper focuses on discussing and analyzing several elements underpinning and hindrances the participant in this study learning English. This report will first present the participant's profile and the methodology that is utilized for acquiring data. Then it will present the summary and discussion of findings before reaching a reasoned conclusion.

The participant in this study is Maria (pseudonym). At the time the data were taken, she was 44 years old and an English lecturer in one of the universities in Indonesia. She is currently a doctoral of philosophy student at the University of South Australia. The journey of Maria in learning English takes a quite long journey until she is into English. Maria has been learning English as an additional language for almost 19 years. The first time she learned English was in secondary school since English was a compulsory subject in her school. During learning English in the secondary level, she is not interested in learning this subject as she thought that English was one of the most difficult subjects to master. She found that English was an interesting subject when she pursued a bachelor degree in the English Department. At the university, she involved in an English club and had a chance to practice her English with her seniors and native English speakers. After holding a bachelor's degree from a university, her enthusiasm in studying English gradually increased since he had high curiosity in studying in western's culture. This drives her to keep learning English until she had a chance to pursue Master Business Administration in the United Kingdom under the British Chevening Scholarship. Several years later, she then gained an Australian Development Scholarship (ADS) to attend her second master's degree, Master of Education (TESOL) at one of the

universities in Australia. Immersing in these two English speaking environments for several years had significantly improved her English skill. After finishing her master's degree and worked for several years in Indonesia, she is now pursuing a doctoral degree at one of the universities in South Australia.

2. METHOD

2.1. Methods of data collection

This study employed a semi-structured interview. The interview had been conducted for about 40-60 minutes in April 2018. To reach the participant's confidence and lessen the degree of formality, the participant was interviewed by English but she enabled to answer in both Bahasa and English. Follow up questions have also been asked in another day for clarifying several unclear terms and answers.

2.2. Research Approach

This study used a narrative inquiry as the research approach. This approach allows the participant to explore the participant's story and experience to generate the data (Clandinin & Caine 2012). To analyze the data, this study utilized thematic analysis for capturing themes portrayed from the participant's point of view.

2.3. Research Question

This paper is intended to answer this research question: What types of factors that supporting and hindering the language learning in learning English?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lightbown and Spada (2012) in their book 'How Languages are Learned' describes several learner characteristics that are underpinning and hindrance language learners in learning English. These factors refer to intelligence, language learning aptitude, learning styles, personality, attitudes and motivation, motivation in the classroom, identity and learners' beliefs. Each of the aspects has its own characteristics that govern the individual's ability to succeed in mastering additional language (Lightbown & Spada, 2012). For instance, motivation factor that categorize into two type of motivations; instrumental motivation and integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2012). These two motivations have different characteristics that have an influence on how language learners motivate themselves in learning a new language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) argues that instrumental motivation is learning language for practical reasons, such as getting a good job or high salary (as cited in Lightbown Spada, 2012). Integrative motivation, on the other hand, refers to learning a language for having cultural experience directly in the targeted culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2012). Both of these type motivations have clearly motivate language learners in learning a new language. Similarly, Griffiths identifies several characteristics of good language learners. These characteristics have a relation with learners' age, learning style, learning strategy, motivation, autonomy, metacognition, beliefs, gender, aptitude and culture (as cited in Wahyudi 2014).

Several previous studies focus on research about the strategy used by Good Language Learning (GLL) and its characteristics (Wahyudi, 2012 & Griffiths, 2015). Moreover, other studies which uncover students' motivation and learning strategies in Indonesia have also been

conducted by many scholars (Yufrizal, Sudirman, & Basturi Hasan, 2015; Deswarni, 2017). The study of exploring factors supporting and hindering language learning experience in learning English, however, is still limited in Indonesia. This research, therefore, attempts to fill this absence.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Supporting Factors

This paper confirms that there were three different factors supporting Maria in learning English. The first factor is individual factor which is divided into two different sections; motivation and learning styles. Motivation plays an indispensable role in encouraging language learners to learn English. One of the essential motivations that should be possessed by language learners is called integrative motivation. Johson (2008) argues that integrative motivation refers to having a high willingness to be incorporated with the culture and people of the target language. In other words, a student who has integrative motivation would have a sense of belonging to the target language (Jones 2006). Maria has this type of motivation. From the interview, it can be found that one of the reasons why she wants to study English is that due to having a high curiosity about western culture and feeling integrated with their culture. She clearly states :

I was also curious of their cultures. That's why, when I watched the movie about western culture, I do feel integrate with their culture. If I remember my dream for going to these two countries, it really motivates me to improve my English and I feel so motivated and energized when learning English.

From this script, Maria used integrative motivation in order to motivate her learning English. Because she would like to immerse and learn more about western cultures in both UK and Australia, these had driven her to keep motivating learning English. Therefore, integrative motivation might be essential to enhance students' willingness to learn English. However, having integrative motivation might not be insufficient in assisting language learner learning an additional language. Another motivation that should be had by ELL is called instrumental motivation (Johson, 2008, p. 126). Johson (2008) states that people who have this type of encouragement tend to have a practical reason in learning a language. For instance, learning English for studying abroad or having a better job. Maria had also this motivation since the main reason why she was motivated to learn English due to her dream of studying in English speaking countries. She explained that :

Well, pursuing master degree in English speaking countries, such as in the UK or in Australia, was my dreams. That's why I always motivated to boost my English. This such a big motivation for me to improve my English.

What Maria has stated is also in line with the research conducted by Tsai (2012). In his study, he found that both integrative and instrumental motivations have a correlation in affecting language learners learn English. Maria employed these two types of motivations when she learned English. Thus, it can be seen that both integrative and instrumental motivations have a positive impact on the student's motivation for learning and additional language.

Another individual factor that influences Maria in improving her English is due to learning style. Reid cited in Lightbown and Spada (2013, p. 83) describes learning style as a person's habit in retaining information and skills. This style is divided into visual learners (learning from vision), auditory learner (learning from ear) and kinesthetic learner (learning from physical action, such as role play) (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Since Maria is a visual learner, to enhance her English skills, she enjoyed reading novels and writing new vocabulary in a notebook. After reading, she then wrote new phrases or vocabularies on her book into wordlists. This learning strategy was so helpful in developing her English skill, particularly to increase her vocabulary as Wu (2004) argues that recalling vocabulary into wordlist is an essential technique to improve learners' vocabulary. Apart from Maria's experience, there is a study related to the effectiveness of memorizing wordlist vocabulary in learning a language. This research conducted by Li as cited in Wu (2014) found that almost 90% of Chinese students used wordlist techniques to increase their vocabulary. Therefore, it can be seen that employing particular learning styles, such as learning by eyes and doing, would also have an impact on the learner in learning English.

Another factor underpins Maria study English is an environmental factor which divided into three; immersing in English speaking countries, involving an English speaking club, and teaching strategies used by Maria's English teacher. Immersion in English speaking countries, such as UK and Australia, had a considerable impact on Maria to improve her English and to understand the culture. Ellis (as cited in Tsai, 2012) asserts that exposure to targeted language countries may reflect the language learners' input in learning a targeted language. This not only reflects on their English skill but also in handling different cultures (Lahdenpera, 2000 as cited in Tsai, 2012). Maria had pursued her master's degree in two western countries, UK and Australia. Studying in these two countries not only improved her English skills but also understanding in learning culture. When she was in England, for example, she found that her English improved dramatically since she always communicated English with her colleagues and friends. Moreover, she also had a chance to understand the culture from diverse backgrounds, particularly the culture in the United Kingdom and Australia. Moran (2001) asserts that when language learners involved in particular groups or communities from different social settings, the usage of appropriate language is important. Maria said that :

You know, when I was in UK and Australia, I found my English improved dramatically because I almost used English everytime. This is because I lived in the international accommodation and no one from Indonesia in my class. This condition not only could improve my English but also to understand different cultures around me, especially learning western culture from both UK and Australia. These experiences were so fantastic because it has totally boosted my English and my experience in different cultures.

Involving in the English study club was used by Maria for underpinning her English skill. Maria realized that her communicative skill, such as speaking, was not well-developed when she was in senior high school. Maria, therefore, involved in English speaking club when she was in the first semester in tertiary education. Maria told that to help the members of the club improve their English, the tutor utilized Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky states that ZPD is a gap between what learners can do independently and what students can do after acquiring educational supports (as cited in Lantolf & Throne, 2006, p. 206). In the English club where Maria involved, all members, including Maria got scaffolding to enhance their communicative skill, particularly speaking skill. For instance, the tutor used English movies

and then wrote several language expressions and vocabulary related to the movies, then the tutor asked students' opinions about the movie that they had watched. In addition, her tutor also utilized pictures or videos when discussing a new topic. According to Maria, what her tutor did was so valuable to increase her communicative competence.

The teaching strategy, Grammar Translation Method (GMT), employed by Maria's English teacher, had a positive impact on Maria's grammar skill. Harmer (2007, p.63) states that GMT more emphasis on teaching language as a set of rules (grammar) than teaching English in a communicative way. In addition, the utilization of native language is frequently used in this method (Harmer, 2007). Due to using GMT frequently in the class, it had an effect on Maria's ability in learning English. Even though at that time she could not speak English well, but she had good ability in grammar. Maria argued :

Although my English teacher only used traditional strategy in her teaching, I enjoyed the way of her explanation about grammar. She was so meticulous and had a good understanding of grammar, and I always got a high score when the questions from my teacher were about grammar.

From her explanation, the learning strategy that was applied by her English teacher influenced he the utilization of GMT had also a positive influence on Maria to enhance her grammar skill.

4.2. Factors Hindering Maria Learning English.

Environmental and personal factors had been perceived by the participant as hindering factors when she learned English. In this study, there are several environmental factors hindering Maria from learning English. The first factor is a lack of home support. Walqui and Aida (2000) state that home support plays an indispensable role in learning a foreign language. Maria, however, did not has much support from her family. Although her family gave indirect support, such as paid her English course and provided English books, these were inadequate to support the progress of Maria in English. Based on Maria's explanation, the most important encouragement that she needed that having a chance to practice English at home. In fact, no one from her family members could communicate in English. Thus, she always used the local language and Bahasa Indonesia in her house. Due to this condition, she felt that could not develop her English effectively.

The second environmental circumstance is workforce. Even though Maria was an English lecturer at one of the leading universities in Indonesia, she could not use English effectively when teaching her language learners. Maria stated that if she used English fully in the class, her students tended to have an objection since they would not understand the content of courses. The same case happened when she involved with her co-workers at her workforce. In spite of the fact that almost eighty percent of co-workers were graduated from overseas, they rarely utilized English when they have daily communication at the workforce. These unsupported factors were totally different from the condition when she studied in English speaking countries where she used to exposure to English. Consequently, she found that these unsupportive environments hindered her English. Thus, environmental factors, such as home support and workforce, have been factors hindering Maria learn English.

Maria believed that personal factors, particularly learner's anxiety in learning an additional language, hindered her English development. Spada and Lightbown (2013) identify several types of anxiety in learning an additional language, such as 'worry, stress and

nervousness'. In this context, Maria experienced these symptoms, particularly when she was in secondary school. Due to the lack of chance for developing speaking skill, she was always hesitant and anxious when she tried to speak English even in a small group discussion. This situation leads to an unwillingness to participate in the class. Based on Maria's explanation, she perceived that this factor (anxiety) was one of the serious problems hindering her ability to develop speaking skill. However, this type of feeling might not be an enormous problem in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) since almost every language learners have this common feeling. As Yim (2012) argues the limitation of exposure to English causes anxiety for EFL students. In addition, Yim (2012) states that it is common to experience anxiety when learning English. Therefore, although Maria has seen that her anxiety experience had a seriously detrimental effect on her progress, this might not be an alarming problem, since it may be a normal situation for EFL learners.

4.3. Pedagogic Implications

To enhance Maria's performances in English, it would be important to identify limitations and then proposing suggested solutions. The main limitation is the lack of chance for developing communicative skills due to environmental factors (school and home). To attribute the class problem, it is suggested for the English teacher to employ Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method rather than only use one teaching strategy GMT. Burns (2005, p. 11) argues that CLT is an approach that focusing on developing the communicative skills of students. Richard (2006, p. 5) supports this view. He argues that due to this approach is students' center, it would encourage language learners to be active in the class. In addition, although people around Maria, such as her family and co-workers could not speak English, Maria should invite them to start speaking English. This strategy might not be able to increase her speaking skill dramatically, yet it would assist her in keeping using English in her house and workplace. The second is the problem of anxiety. To deal with this, it is important for the language teacher to promote classroom activity, which can boost language learners' self-esteem. Turula (2002) promotes the term 'a clear sense of direction' which means employing particular activities in the classroom to achieve the learning goal. This sense of direction would be achieved if the teacher can create a motivating classroom environment by building high self-esteem among language learners. To create this supporting class, several essential factors need to be implemented. These factors are attractive teaching style, clear explanation, the personalities of teachers, professional qualifications, and the knowledge of the targeted language (Prodromou cited in Turula 2002).

5. CONCLUSION

Language learners faced different challenges when learning English. This study has identified several factors that supported and hindered the participant's in learning English. Personal factors, which have been classified into motivation and learning style, and environmental factors, which consist of immersion in the targeted language, involved in English club, and the English teacher's strategy have been perceived by the participant as supporting factors in learning English. However, environmental factors, such as lack of home support and unsupportive working environment and learning anxiety, have contributed to several factors that hindered Maria from learning English. Suggested interventions, such as utilizing the communicative method and promoting a sense of direction, have been described to propose the solutions.

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