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TEACHING ENGLISH FOR HEARING-IMPAIRED STUDENTS: AN EXPERIENCE AT SEKOLAH LUAR BIASA NEGERI TIPE B BLITAR, EAST JAVA

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ABSTRACT

Studies about teaching practices are mostly conducted to classrooms with non-physical impairment students. Few literatures can be found concerning theories and practices in teaching English for students with physical impairment like those who have sight or hearing impairment. In Indonesian education system, the government does not differentiate the teaching of English between physically impaired and non-physically impaired students. As seen in the document of the Standard of Content, the goal, core competence, and basic competence of teaching English are the same. However, the educational process for physically impaired students is intended more on making them self-independent. Classroom activities, therefore, are emphasized more on how the students acquire various life skills. The English teachers must work extra hard in meeting the goal of national education. The current paper is intended to share the experience of English teachers at a school for hearing-impaired students (Sekolah Luar Biasa Negeri Tipe B) Blitar, East Java in teaching English. Due to the physical condition of the students, strategies such as drilling, memorization, and modeling are considered as the best to be applied in such school. In addition, media like realia and miniature are helpful in the teaching process. At this context, the best means the easiest and the most effective strategies for the particular type of school. The attainment of the teaching objectives is mainly focused on introducing students to various words and sentences in English.

Key words: *teaching English, hearing-impaired student, school for hearing-impairment*

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of foreign language for the deaf and hearing-impaired students is not a new issue. However, so far not many methodologists and textbook writers are aware of a substantial group who does not get the benefit of the teaching of foreign language. The deaf and hearing-impaired students are not given sufficient attention in the teaching of foreign language. Even issue on teaching foreign language for them is seemingly marginalized. Until 1900s, deaf education is dominated by oralist approach which has firm conviction that deafness is a disability; a deficiency needs to be mitigated or overcome (Kontra and Csizer, 2013). Disability, according to Barbotte, Guillemin, and Chau (2001), is a condition in which a person is not able to perform activity within the range of human capability. The difference between deaf and hearing-impaired students lies upon the level of hearing loss. The range of hearing loss lies upon mild hearing loss, moderate hearing loss, severe hearing loss, and profound deafness (Kemdiknas, 2009). In the field of language learning, the level of hearing loss affects the acquisition of language skills. The milder the hearing loss, the easier the process in acquiring foreign language will be because spoken language input can be received with the help of the remained hearing ability.

In Indonesian context, the needs of education for learners with impairment are accommodated by the government by establishing schools for disabled --nowadays it is called as diffable-- students (*Sekolah Luar Biasa*). The schools are classified into several types, namely type A for students with sight-impairment, type B for students with hearing-impairment/deaf, type C for students with low intelligent, type D for students with physical impairment, type E for students with emotional disorder, type G for students with more than two impairments. The classification is worth doing as it can meet the needs of different type of diffability (Government Regulation No 72/1991). In practice, the establishment of such schools helps both the teachers and the students despite the issue of inclusive education where students with special needs learn together with ordinary school in one class. However, the language

policy for the students with impairment has no difference from “normal” students. Based on the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education number 64/2013, the standard of competence and the basic competence apply for both types of students. There is no dichotomy between curriculum for general students and those of special need. This means that the teachers at *Sekolah Luar Biasa* get harder responsibility in enhancing students’ communicative competence due to the students’ physical problem.

Teaching at school for disabled students requires teacher’s creativity and patience in addition to knowledge and teaching skill. The teachers also need to be able to understand the way the students communicate. Commonly, hearing-impaired students use two modes of communications, namely, oral and manual (Kemdiknas, 2009, p.34). Oral communication appears in the form of practicing vocal (speech), reading lip movement, and using the remained hearing ability. Meanwhile, manual communication includes the use of sign language and finger spelling. The sign languages in Indonesia which are generally used by the deaf or hearing impaired are of two: *Sistem Isyarat Bahasa Indonesia (SIBI)* and *Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia (Bisindo)*. The two systems are different. SIBI is made by changing Indonesian spoken language into sign language, in this case, translating one word with its suffixes. For example, the word *permainan* is translated as *per-main-an*. For the students who have never learned the structure of sentence, this sign language is difficult to learn. Bisindo, on the contrary, appears in the form of one word followed by an expression of what is going on. For example, the word mother is expressed by putting the right thumb on the chin while the other fingers are opened. Bisindo is considered as simpler and natural for the deaf and hearing impaired students, so it is proposed to replace SIBI (Arindra Meodia, October 23, 2014).

The current paper is intended to share the experience of the teachers teaching English in *Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) Tipe B Negeri* Blitar, East Java, a school for hearing-impaired students. The students in such school are mostly hearing-impaired, not deaf. So, the process of oral communication still can be conducted even though the teachers should repeat instructions or questions several times just to make sure that the students understand. Similar to any schools for the disabled students, the main goal of carrying out education that school is rather on helping the students to enhance life skills to live independently than on fulfilling the requirements of curriculum. However, it is a fact that English colors everybody, including hearing-impaired students, in all aspects of life. The least need of English for the hearing-impaired students is to be able to understand information written in English. The teachers are therefore expected to internalize the concept of second language as well as foster students’ independence in living a life. With regard to the differences of the characteristics of the students, investigating how the teachers practice teaching English is worth doing.

METHOD

This study sought to explore the practices in teaching English to the hearing-impaired students at *Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) Tipe B Negeri* Blitar East Java. The school serves the education for hearing impaired students starting from elementary level till senior high school level. The subjects of the study were two teachers; one was a teacher at junior high school level, and another was a teacher at senior high school level. The teachers rarely used sign language like SIBI or Bisindo because the students still have remained hearing ability. The investigation was done to the teachers of the high school levels since the teaching of English could only be observed at those levels. In the elementary level, English was not formally taught. In addition, due to the limitation of the students’ physical condition, the education process was focused on providing students with various life skills. Every day, the classroom instructions consisted of practices in making useful home appliances such as carpentry, sewing, farming, etc.

Under qualitative approach, the data were collected through three methods, namely interview, observation, and documentation. To get detailed information about the teachers’ practices, open-ended interviews were done. The purpose was to make the teachers feel free to the answers and give clarification to the posed questions. The interviews were done casually in Indonesian to make it easier for the teachers to express their experiences and to avoid any communication block. The questions were classified into four dimensions; teaching preparation, teaching strategies, teaching media, and kinds of evaluation implemented in the classroom. To confirm the teachers’ explanations about their teaching practices, non-participatory observations

were done. This was done as it was possible that their explanations did not match with their practice in the classroom. Prior to doing the observation, the writer told the teachers that there would be no intervention their practice of teaching English. So, the writer sat at the back row in the classroom observing the teaching and learning process while taking notes of what was going on. In addition to the two methods of collecting data, interview and observation, an analysis of the teachers' document was also conducted. The purpose was to check the teachers' preparation especially the teaching strategies. Once the data were collected, data analysis followed. Following Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 10-12), the data analysis were done through three stages, namely, data reduction (reducing any data such as chunks or explanation irrelevant to the present study), data display (analyzing and classifying the assorted data), and conclusion drawing.

The present study has also some limitations. First, since the number of SLB Tipe B Negeri in Blitar municipality is only one, the information from the teachers cannot be compared and contrasted with other teachers from different schools. As a result, the information might not be as comprehensive as when the study is conducted in general schools. The second limitation deals with the capability of the writer in communicating with the students. Since the writer was not accustomed to using sign language, any information from the students cannot be understood well and included in the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study found some important information related to the practices in teaching English for hearing-impaired students. Following the stages of data analysis by Miles and Huberman's (1994) as mentioned previously, the process were initiated by assorting the relevant chunks. Only parts of conversations which were relevant to the topic of the present study were used as the data. The irrelevant ones were left. Then, the assorted chunks were classified into four dimensions, namely, teaching preparation, teaching practices, teaching media, and evaluation.

The findings of the study revealed that prior to teaching English the preparation was made similarly to the teaching of English in general schools. Since there was no difference in terms of the Standard of Competence and basic Competence to be achieved by the students, the development of the teaching preparation was done in the same way as teaching students without impairment in general schools. The process was initiated by breaking down the Standard of Competence and Basic Competence into indicators and teaching objectives. The teaching and learning activities were designed similarly to the design for general students. When it was confirmed to the teachers the reason of developing the same lesson plan with teaching English for general students, the teachers stated that this was because the standard of competence and basic competence applied to all types of students. This means that the hearing-impaired students were expected to achieve similar competence to the students without impairment both in spoken and written form. The government regulation number 72/1991 chapter VIII article 16, however, provides a space for the teacher to adjust the curriculum with the students' condition. At this point, it is understandable that in designing the classroom activities the teachers did not make it very specific. Even though in the lesson plan the classroom activities seemed to be complex in practice the teacher might simplify the activities depending on the students' condition.

The second dimension of the present study is the strategies employed in teaching English. Based on the interview and observation, the most frequently applied strategy was drilling. The teachers pronounced a word several times. The students watched, read the movement of the teachers' lips, and tried to imitate the teachers' pronunciation. A word was pronounced several times by the teacher and repeated several times. The teachers' effort was supported by the structural theory of language which views that language consists of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning (Richards and Rogers, 1998, p.17). According to Freeman (2000, p.42), one of the major roles of the teachers is to provide good model of second language to the students. In the current context of study, the teachers modeled the pronunciation to the students more intensively so that the students would get sufficient of input of the sounds in English. Since the students had problem with hearing ability, one word must be repeated many times. In addition, while drilling, the teachers visualized the word by using gestures, facial, expression.

Another strategies employed by the teachers was memorization. Memorization was considered as the easiest strategy to be implemented in the classroom because more complicated activities were difficult to be carried out. In practice, the teachers distributed list of words to be memorized by the students. The teachers also gave assignment to memorize words at home. According to the teachers the only homework that can be given to the students was memorizing the words. Even though in the document of curriculum it was clearly stated that the teaching objective is enhancing students' communicative competence either in written or spoken form, the attainment of such objective seemed to be difficult. The teacher of senior high level stated *"the students cannot be expected to be communicative--written or spoken—as mandated in the curriculum because they find difficulties in developing sentences using English. They can only develop simple sentences because it is very difficult to give explanation about compound or complex sentences, therefore, the homework given was only memorizing words. We cannot ask them to write texts or read complex text."* As much as possible, however, the teachers tried to initiate communicative classroom atmosphere. For example, by making simple game like matching game in which the students should compete with their friends to match the picture and the words.

The observed teachers stated that although teaching at school for hearing-impaired students was intended to attain students' various language skills but the fact showed differently. Some teaching objectives cannot be achieved especially the ones in enhancing communicative competence orally or written form. Students found difficulty to understand complex expression. Therefore, to make the students get more understanding on the words/sentences/expression they learned, the teachers modeled the action. For example, the teachers said *'open the door!'*, then walked to the door and opened it. There was also a time for the students to practice themselves. In turn, they gave command and perform the actions. The result of observation showed that the students' motivation increased as could be seen from the students' participation in commanding and performing the action. Within the perspective of Total Physical Response method such kind of action was useful because it was fun and can reduce students' psychological barriers in the classroom. The practice of modeling did have limitation since not all expressions can be modeled using actions. As a result, the teachers limited to teach expressions possible to be modeled.

The third dimension of the topic in the current study was the use of teaching media. To maintain successful teaching, using teaching media is a must. The same was true with the practice in the observed school. The interview with the teachers revealed that there were limited media which can be used in the classroom. Audio media like tape recorder and radio cannot be employed because they students would find difficulty to understand the spoken conversation without reading the lips of the speakers. The result of observation showed that the teaching of English is emphasized on mastering vocabularies with very limited communicative activities. In such case, the teachers looked for the most effective teaching media through which the students can learn well. Realia, then, was mostly used. The real thing or realia such as fruits or any things exist in the classroom were used media for teaching. Freeman (2000, p. 42) states that the use of realia can add the meaning of the new words. In other words, bringing realia into the classroom, as long as it is feasible, ease the jobs of the teachers especially in introducing new words of the foreign language. The observed teachers from the junior high school level stated that to foster students' motivation, she gave assignment to the students to bring realia to the class and find the English name of the realia. The students were asked to show the realia to their friends and told the English words of such kind of realia. This activity was fun and could be categorized as communicative activities even though the level of communicativeness was low.

In addition to realia, another teaching media employed was miniature. The teacher brought the miniatures of means of transportation such as bicycle, motorcycle, car, aero plane, etc. and drilled the names of such things to the students. The students, using the ability of reading the movement of the lips and the remained hearing ability, imitated the pronunciation of the teachers. In some cases miniature is merely suitable for young learners who can only understand information concretely. However, for the hearing-impaired students, it turned out to be appropriate too especially in the context of teaching English as a foreign (second) language. The hearing-impaired students whose native language is not English usually get limited access to English. By using miniature, they can see the things, so they understood what they learned. In

other words, more senses could be involved in learning. Lindsay and Knight (2006, p. 20) note that the more the senses were used the higher the probability of the success in learning second language. The implication is that prior to teaching, the teachers must be creative in designing the classroom activities. As much as possible, classroom activities should involve various senses like sense of sight, sound, touch, etc.

The fourth dimension is evaluation. Based on the interview with the teachers, to evaluate students' progress, pencil and paper test was often used. Such kind of test only measured students' cognitive competence, actually. However, the only feasible kind of evaluation to be applied in this kind of classroom was test. Authentic assessment such as peer assessment or exhibition was not the concern of the teachers. It was difficult for the teachers to select the suitable authentic assessment regarding the fact of the students were having hearing-impairment. Many instructions cannot be responded by the students because they could not understand what they should do. The teachers, therefore, find the easiest way to evaluate students even though it did not follow the mandate of curriculum which emphasized the need of doing authentic assessment.

CONCLUSION

To meet the requirement of curriculum which mandates the attainment of communicative competence of the students, teachers of the school for hearing impaired students needed to be creative. The condition of the students that need special attention required the teachers to select alternatives best for the students. In the current context, the definition of best is the easiest and most effective to be applied with regard to the physical condition of the students. The abovementioned strategies were the effective ones because they can improve students' memory and pronunciation. The students were not expected to develop high ability in using English communicatively. Rather, the teaching of English was limited to memorizing vocabularies and developing simple sentences. Therefore, it was recommended that any related parties revisit the goal teaching English for students with different types of impairment. The experience of the teachers showed that the teaching objective was difficult to be obtained since the limitations of students obstruct the process of enhancing their communicative competence. The same was true with the implementation of evaluation. Not many evaluation types could be practiced. Administering test might be the temporary solution for measuring students' progress. However, finding alternative assessment suitable for hearing-impaired students is a good idea.

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