English Learning Program for Indonesians working in domestic sector abroad: Some language-related aspects to be considered.

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to present the necessary arguments for why Indonesian domestic workers should be provided with English language training program prior to their work especially in Asian English-speaking countries. Accordingly, it therefore, aims at highlighting several aspects of learning and learning English which are important to be taken into account considering the learners' background and their target language situations in order to form a basis for pertinent and effective English language training.

Keywords: Domestic workers, language training, targeted language competencies

A. Introduction

Education has so far become an inseparable part of human lives. Everyone simply needs education in whatever forms it might be (formal or informal) in order to make a better living or have a better sense of life. It is with education that human is becoming more human as education concerns with personal development, self-acceptance, and acceptance by others (Ibid). In the same way, UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st century also sees education as having a fundamental role in personal and social development and thereby to reduced poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war (Delors, et. al)

In our global economy and competitive world, education is one of the most important factors to enable people to get into good jobs, to survive the competition and eventually to have a better quality of life. Through education and learning, people develop the necessary competencies to be qualified in terms of human development and meet the requirement for the satisfaction of manpower needs (Widdowson, 1984).

One of the competencies needed to support one's profession in today's globalized world will easily be English language. However, not everybody has the opportunity to have English language education as one way of improving their qualification. This situation is likely to be encountered by Indonesians who wish to work as domestic workers in some Asian English-speaking countries.

At this moment, Indonesians working in the domestic sector overseas such as in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong, are truly in need for English language training. Coming from poor families, many of those workers have only limited educational background, and most of them have no or very little access in getting English language education to support their future domestic services. As a result, many Indonesian domestic workers are not ideally qualified for the job. As a matter of fact, according to Huang and Yeoh (1998) as cited by Rachman (2003), in Singapore, Indonesian domestic workers are stereotyped as 'cheap and docile' unlike their Filipino counterparts whom are considered more superior because of their command of the English language and higher education qualification (21). They are thereby more expensive to hire.

For this very reason, English language training for Indonesian domestic workers must be considered as of a paramount importance. With a qualification of English language, our foreign domestic workers will not only be able to compete with domestic workers from other countries, but they will also be able to do their job better and more professionally. And most importantly, having been qualified with English language, those workers will likely to become more independent individuals and empowered social beings living and dealing with a whole new culture.

B. English Language and English Language Learning

English is currently one of the most important languages in the world for being used internationally as a medium of communication, interaction, information, business transaction and many more. In other words, English has been a lingua franca in many places (Brumfit, 2001: 117). Currently, the English language used in this world arena has been described as a 'free-floating lingua franca' (International English) due to the increasing numbers of world Englishes. However, the local Englishes or new varieties of English should not be a problem for as long as it is perfectly intelligible internationally (Reeves & Halliday, 2002).

In many Asian countries, English is either a second language in which it is used as a means of communication such as in Singapore or it is a foreign language that is mainly learned at schools such as in Indonesia.

The nature of context of the English language use has greatly influenced the acquisition of English language itself. As stated by Krashen that learning refers to the formal study of language rules and is in a conscious process that never leads to language acquisition whereas acquisition refers to the natural assimilation of language rules through using language for communication (1981). Meanwhile, the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching view that language learning can be better promoted through activities that involve real communication rather than those that mainly involve the study of language rules (Richards & Rodgers, 2003) Thus, the focus of language learning in Communicative Language Teaching is on communicative function.

In the mean time, the communication principle held by CLT can be seen as one of the elements underlying a learning theory which associates learning with process rather than product (Shekan, 1998; Feez, 1998). Process oriented theories build on learning process, such as habit formation, induction, inferencing, hypothesis testing, and generalization (Richards & Rodgers, 2003). It is, therefore, to say that language learning that bases itself on communication will to some extent help learners construct knowledge, skill and attitude toward the language learned. In a broader sense, a language learner constructs his or herself through communication.

C. The Nature of English Language and English Language Learning for Indonesian Domestic Workers

With regards to the main function of language as a means of communication, the nature of English language to be learned by groups of Indonesian domestic workers should also be built around communication. The ability of Indonesian domestic workers to communicate and interact in English will help them understand and do their jobs better, especially since communication constitutes the basis of and plays an important role in their domestic works. Since English is very important to support those learners' professions as domestic workers, the purpose and the process of learning English language need to address their immediate field of work. Consequently, it should address for instance certain language competencies or skills which are particularly needed to perform their jobs.

With all the above considerations, the nature English language learning program for Indonesian domestic workers would be based around the current communicative approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching, Competencies-Based Language Teaching and Content-based Instruction.

In Communicative Language Teaching, language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes which is why the classroom tasks are bound to equip learners with the skills necessary for communication in the contexts outside the classroom from which learners are encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others (Cf. Brown, 2001). This approach is, therefore, in line with the basic need of Indonesian domestic workers for learning English language namely to understand, communicate and interact with other people (i.e.: employer, officer, neighbors, etc) within the context of their future profession.

As with Competency-Based Language Teaching, its inclusion and implementation in the English language learning program for domestic workers is necessary to help them approach the identified or targeted language competencies which they need to perform their roles in domestic works. As cited in Richards and Rodgers (2003), CBLT has often been used in situations where learners have specific needs and in a particular roles, and where the language skills they need can be fairly accurately predicted and determined (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 141). In other words, CBLT poses itself as a performance-based instruction aiming at making language learners capable of using English while performing their tasks or as they engage in the areas in which English language competency is in support for their specific working performance

In addition, the resort to Content-Based Instruction (CBI) also seems compatible with the nature of the English program. It is since successful language learning occurs when students are presented with target situation material in a meaningful, contextualized form with the primary focus on acquiring information (Briton et al., Wesche, 1989:17). In justifying this claim, CBI proponents refer to ESP studies that "note that for successful learning to occur, the language syllabus must take into account the eventual uses the learners will make of the target language" and further that "the use of informational content which is perceived as relevant by the learners is assumed by many to increase motivation in the language course, and thus to promote more effective learning" (Briton et.al. 1989:3). The

same situation could also be true for the English learning program established for Indonesian domestic workers when it is able to identify and incorporate any relevant learning materials taken from the students' target situation.

D. The Design of English Learning Program for Indonesian Domestic Workers

Indonesians who work as domestic workers abroad are the same as other people who come from other professions in that they all need to learn and educate themselves in order to help them gain a better understanding of life in general and of their job in particular.

It is the nature of the domestic works that has, among others, provided the language program with the point of departure in identifying the learning goals. In addition, the learners, in this case, Indonesian domestic workers also serve as an important source of data in determining learners' needs.

1. Learners Characteristic

Many Indonesian women are working in the domestic sector in some Asian English speaking countries. According to the data taken from *Harian Suara Pembaharuan*, many of Indonesian migrant workers are not even Junior Secondary High School (SMP) graduates, about 70% of those migrant workers are only Elementary School graduates. Their educational backgrounds, therefore, clearly indicate their poor English language competency. This means that most of them are not ideally qualified for domestic sectors abroad. Another similarity possessed by those migrant workers aside from their low level English language proficiency is that all of them are supposed to be female. Another factor that characterizes this particular group of workers is their age composition. According to Indonesian Manpower Law (UU 39/2004 Pasal 41 - 49) the minimum age for Indonesians to be allowed to work as domestic workers is 21 years old. This implies that we can expect for a 21 years old with a 40 years old being in the program.

2. Learning Goal

In determining the goal of learning or practically, the goal of the course for Indonesian domestic workers, we must refer to three kinds of identified needs as a point of departure namely learners (domestic workers) needs, learning needs, and target situation needs.

a. Learners' Needs

Indonesian domestic workers which involve in the English learning program play an active role in determining the learning goal. The learners have a view as to what their needs or wants are (Hutchinson & Walter, 1994: 56). Meanwhile, Richterich's (1984) view of learners' needs is:

...a need does not exist independent of a person. It is people who build their images of their needs on the basis of data relating themselves and their environment (29)

In other words, we can say that learners' needs may be seen as a subjective view of needs held by the learners such as what English language skills they need or want to learn with regard to their current English competence and their target work situation. For instance, the need analysis involving Indonesian domestic workers revealed that most participants want to learn and improve their English language skills to be able to survive in all sorts of situations.

b. Learning Needs

Learning needs analysis enables trainers to identify learners' attitudes towards different kinds of teaching methodology, learning tasks and activities (Wright, 1992). This analysis too would help course designer and material providers to develop courses and practice materials which use the learners' preferred methods of learning, so that learning is more effective. In general, learning needs analysis will show *how* people learn to do what they do with language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1994). The learning needs analysis involving Indonesian domestic workers who had been working in Singapore for about 2 years indicated that from their experience, her role/job as domestic workers has made her interact with different kinds of people in almost different kinds of situations. This suggests that language learning should therefore focus on communication. This means that communicative teaching method is more preferred. In addition, analysis has also suggested that most of their household tasks and daily activities involve the use of English, such as in understanding certain instruction or information either spoken or written. This means that prior English learning for our domestic workers should be made content-based and as authentic as possible. The requirement of authenticity means that learning

tasks or materials should reflect or embody the activities done and used in the actual situations. Whereas, the requirement that the learning materials be content-based means that they should focus on specific items that people are likely to encounter in their everyday working lives in the ESP field.

c. Target Situation Needs

In addition to learners' needs and learning needs, target situation needs should also be taken into account in determining the objective of language learning. It is since the analysis of the target situations will help us figure out the type of need required by the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation (Hutchinson & Water, 1994). The identification of target situation needs is significant as it further helps identify the target proficiencies or competencies that should be met by learners. As soon as the target competencies are stated, a better understanding of learning goal is gained

3. The Components and Process

a. Learning Interaction and Teaching Activities

Due to the communicative objectives of the learning program that reflect the nature of domestic works, the types of exercises and activities should enable learners to engage in communication. It is communicatively purposeful activities in which the activities are often designed to focus on completing tasks that involve negotiation of meanings which are mediated through language such as social interaction activities which include conversation, dialogue, role play and simulation. It is therefore more student-centered.

Some stages of lesson delivery that may be followed is: after the pre-teaching stage (warm up), teacher could try to elicit from the learners the target language function that they are about to learn. The teacher then might explain about the function and familiarize the students with that new language function by way of drilling them. The next step, teacher could provide a somewhat controlled and simple communicative task in pairs (i.e. asking and giving instruction), followed by freer communicative tasks (i.e. role play) to practice the new language function.

b. Teachers Functions

The trainer or the teacher plays an important role as facilitator of learning in which she/he facilitates the communication process between learners in the classroom and, between these learners and the various activities and texts. The teacher is also an organizer of the learning resources and the learning activities

c. Instructional Materials Functions

Materials play an important part in creating opportunities for the students to engage in communicative tasks or activities. In the case of domestic workers' English class, the use of authentic materials in the classroom such as signs, advertisement, documents, realia, or other visual sources around which communicative activities can be built is of primary importance

d. Syllabus Design

With regard to the communicative objective of the learning program, the curriculum and syllabus should therefore be built around the notion of communicativeness. In this case, the type of syllabus is functional/task-based. Here, the syllabus reflects and organizes the language functions and the real world-tasks that learners should perform using English language such as: understanding instructions, asking for directions, describing process, making and receiving phone calls, etc.

Conclusion

It is important that the English learning program for Indonesian domestic workers is the one that meet their need for learning the language- that is to function successfully in their future profession. Therefore, needs analysis that involves analyzing learning needs, learners' needs (involving ex- Indonesian domestics workers), and target situations needs need to be carried out to help identify and set the learning goals.

Hence, considering their nature of works and the target language situations, I propose that the analysis of needs should be based around the communicative use of the language as the focus of learning and that learning

English should be made as authentic as possible in order to provide and anticipate learners with real-world tasks in their future profession.

English language learning program for Indonesians working in domestic sector overseas (i.e. in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong) is an immediate need and of a great significance. Their improved and increased qualification in English language will help those domestic workers to work better and more professionally. With a qualification in English language, they too can become a more empowered and autonomous individual and social being in dealing with new living and working environment.

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