

RISK-TAKING AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO MAKE SUCCESS OF LEARNING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The success of language learning can be affected by internal and external factors. One of the internal factors is risk-taking. This factor drives learners to be able to gamble a bit, to be willing to try out hunches about the language and take the risk of being wrong. This article elaborates the characteristics of risk-taking learners on learning English, the learners' personal learning problems on learning English, and the methods of increasing risk-taking ability. The methods discussed here directly address the learners' personal learning problems which include inhibition to speak, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and low risk-taking ability. Considering the significant role of risk-taking to the success in learning English, language teachers should establish an encouraging class atmosphere or a nonthreatening classroom climate in their classes to reveal risk takers.

Keywords: success, English learning, risk-taking

English is one of the languages widely used in the world by the speakers whose first language is not English. Besides its function as a means of communication with other speakers, it is also used as a medium to get some information or read materials in English about issues, advancement of technology and knowledge, and understand about different nation or people's culture.

In Indonesia English is often considered as a foreign language or second language. English is one of the subjects taught in school starting from primary to university level. English is the subject on the school curriculum, and it is compulsory for students to take and pass the examination in order to be graduated from school.

To pass from this period, students have to go through the process of learning. Learning process is the path to reach success in which the students have to go through several stages in order to understand something that he or she has not known yet before. Furthermore a student who can carry out the learning activity can be assumed that he understands about something he or she has learnt about something (Rooijackers, 1991:14). One individual's learning process is called internal process. This

internal process can be seen from the student's individual behavioral change or action that reflects the learning (Rooijackers, 1991:5).

Some students learn English faster and more easily than the others in school and they tend to be more successful than the others. Success is perceived from two perspectives, namely the internal and external factors, but in this article, the internal factor would be discussed. Therefore the title chosen is *"Risk-Taking as Contributing Factor to Make Success of Learning English"*.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Learning according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is knowledge obtained by study. Dimiyati and Mudjiono (2006) said that this knowledge obtained by study, or done through a learning activity in any places such as at school, or out of school. Learning can be seen from two perspectives. The first perspective is from teacher's side and it is designed through learning instructions, while from the student's side, it comes from the student's desire to learn.

Dimiyati and Mudjiono define learning is an student's act and student. As an act, learning is only experienced by the student himself/

herself, and determined by the student whether the learning process happens or not (Dimiyati and Mudjiono 2006:7). Furthermore they say that the learning process happens because the student gets something from his/ her learning environment, and this can be seen from the act of learning from outside (Dimiyati and Mudjiono 2006:7).

According to Djamarah (2008:15) learning is an activity that we do to gain knowledge).

Jakobovits (1970:44) learning a language means learning the whole new pattern of habits,..... A little learning like to play the piano or the violin, except that it is easier. Therefore, it is important to practice, to practice, and to practice. The practice should be intensive and enthusiastic in class and out silently to oneself while reading or to fellow students. Involve all your senses as you learn a language by using your ears, mouth, eyes, fingers and use your imagination.

According to Brown learning is a relatively permanent change in a behavioral tendency and is the result of reinforced practice. The components of the definition of learning are : learning is acquisition or getting, retention of information or skill, retention implies storage system, memory, cognitive organization, active, conscious, focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism, relatively permanent but subject to forgetting, involves some form of practice, perhaps reinforced practice, change in behavior (Brown, 1994:7).

Definition of Success

Success by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary definition is the achievement of a desired aim (Hornby 1995: 1193). Success in learning interpreted as a student's desire to achieve something. Key to get a success in learning is to study harder and sacrifice for something to reach the goal (Djamarah 2008, 10-11).

Risk-Taking as a contributing factor to make a success of learning English

Many researches show, the key point to accomplish second language learning depend on the personality differences among learners. There are two contributing factors to make a success of learning the language such as internal and external. The internal factors consist of

natural talent, age, exposure to native speakers, high motivation, risk-taking, strong self-confidence, high self-esteem. Brown uses the term as the affective domain (Brown 1994:134). Obviously students who have these factors are better than the students who do not.

Whereas the external factors are teachers, instructional materials, approach, method, teaching strategies (Shoebottom 1996-2012). According to Walqui, internal factors deal with personality and motivation. They vary from one student to another. External factors refer to the institutional contexts in which language learning takes place; contextual factors in second language acquisition.

According to Brown, there are two aspects contributing to the success of language learning such as of the cognitive and affective domains. The first aspect of the affective domain is called intrinsic that deals with the personality factors within a person and the second aspect is that encompasses extrinsic factors such as socio-cultural variables that emerge as the second language learner brings not only the two languages into contact but also the two cultures, and in some sense, he/she must learn a second culture along with a second language (Brown 1994:134).

Affective domain according to Brown is the emotional side of human behavior, and it may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side (Brown 1994:135). Further Brown says the development of affective states of feelings involves a variety of personality factors, feelings both about ourselves and about others with whom we come into contact.

According to Djamarah, there are some factors contribute to the success of learning such as : (A) obeying learning guide : regularity, be discipline and have a good motivation, focus, good time management such as to rest and to sleep (Djamarah, 2008:15-27); (B) avoiding learning difficultness : determining the learning objective, recognizing the remembering system, recognizing the remembering system range, recognizing the learning type, recognizing the rate of difficulties of book read, avoiding laziness, fulfilling recent wish, note taking for the future wish, writing any unfinished assignments, not to push yourself to study if you are not ready, staying healthy, taking a rest whenever necessary, emptying any unnecessary

memory, mastering the language (Djamarah, 2008:28-42); (C) having intellectual mentality : be honest in any way, smart in thinking and action, reliable, self confidence, optimistic, not to hesitate in taking action, be brave to face the challenge, patience and never give up, take a change in any opportunity, willing to do something in any circumstances, learning effectively, learning while praying, never get satisfied easily on success achieved; (D) mastering the learning method well (Djamarah, 2008: 43-58).

Jakobovits a psycholinguist cited that the Modern Language Association of America sponsored a conference in 1964 which resulted in a statement entitled "Advice to Language Learners" in which consists of ten statements. Then these statements were revised by teachers and linguist. The ten claims about the psychology of foreign learning have been extracted from the 1966 revised statements (Jakobovits 1970:43).

The extracts of statements related to the language learning are: (1) learning a FL facilitates subsequent learning of another FL; (2) any intelligent student can learn a FL provided there are present 'hard work', a good teacher, and a good textbook; (3) a helpful strategy in learning FL is to avoid making direct comparisons between it and English; (4) learning a language means a whole new pattern of habits... a little like learning to play the piano or the violin. Therefore, it is important to practice, to practice, and to practice. Practice should be intensive and enthusiastic in class and out, silently and loudly, to oneself while reading, and to fellow students; (5) there are three techniques in language learning: imitation, analogy, and analysis. Imitation consists of repeating what you hear as closely as you can by listening carefully to your teacher and the other models. Learning how to create by analogy is the purpose of pattern drills and other exercises. (6) As one grows older, he/she begins to lose capacity for easy imitation but he/she gains the advantage of being able to reason: to analyze language, information of this sort given in grammatical explanations or rules can help you to learn the language faster; (7)memorizing sessions should be broken up into several intense short periods; (8)reading and writing are learned more easily if one first

learns to speak the language; (8)practicing to speak should be done right from the start; (9)when reading a FL, one should at first read only what has been previously practiced, and do so out loud; (10)English translation of words or phrases should never be written on the page in the reading book (Jakoboits, 1970:43-45)

Theoretical Approach

There are two theoretical approaches in relation with the success of learning the language as proposed by Brown and Jakobovits discussed in this article. Brown outlines a risk-taking factor as part of aspect of the affective domain or called intrinsic and how this factor influences the success of the language learning. Whereas Jakobovits a psycholinguist outlines learning theory from psycholinguistic perspective adopted in the discussion of the techniques in language learning this article are points (4) and (5) as mentioned above.

Personality Factor

Personality is the characteristics and qualities of a person seen as a whole. An individual's personality is the complex of mental characteristics that makes her/him unique from other people and the qualities make somebody different from other people and interesting. Personality factors according to Brown is the intrinsic side of affectivity that affects in learning English are *self-esteem; inhibition risk-taking; anxiety; empathy; extroversion; motivation* (Brown 1994:136-156). But in this article, I will focus on the risk-taking as contributing factor to make a success of learning English.

DISCUSSION

In this article, I would focus on one particular psychological dimension such as risk-taking. To improve students' learning process towards success, I outlined three components that involved in the discussion of this article such as the first part of this article presents the *overview of characteristic risk-taking learners on learning English and its effects*. The second part is *personal learning problems on learning English*, The third part is the *Method of increasing risk-taking ability*

Overview of the Characteristic of Risk-taking Learners on Learning English and Its Effects

The literature review of risk-taking behavior appeared in the literature of psychology in 1960s (Kogan & Wallach, 1967), and 1970s (Bem, 1971) and it appeared in literature of linguistics and English as a Second Language (ESL) in 1960s, (Labov, 1969), 1980s, (Beebe, 1983, Ely, 1986a). Kogan and Wallach correlated two personality dimensions, motivation and risk-taking behavior to this basis McClelland – Atkinson position, which is a theory of achievement motivation developed by McClelland, Atkinson, Clark and Lowell in 1953, (cited in Beebe, 1983).

Risk-taking is an important characteristic of successful learning of a second language. Learners have to be able to gamble a bit, to be willing to try out hunches about the language and take the risk of being wrong (Brown 1994:140). Related to the characteristics of a “good” language learner, risk-taking is also recognized as important factor in successful language learning. Risk-taking is not only one of the dimensions of individual differences (IDs), but also, it is one of the important parts in second language learning process; moreover, it is a language learning strategy for good language learners who are willing to take risks (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2000).

A risk-taking student is typically student who actively participates in discussion in the class room and answers the questions without being waited to be called by the teacher. This type of student is usually not afraid of speaking in front of his/her classmates and not afraid of making mistakes, and they are willing to take part in class discussions without any fear and they also get involved in language learning activities very quickly and easily. This involvement helps them to learn more and better and more successful. Besides, risk-taking students usually speak more, and talk much in the classroom and therefore they are better than shy students. Furthermore, risk-taking typical students are willing to make a try to produce words or sentences or guess and not be discouraged by making mistakes and being appeared foolish in order to progress. By this way these students will improve their learning from the mistake they made. So the key to the success in second language learning is the

students should be willing to make a try or guess and not be discouraged by making mistakes and appearing foolish.

Personal Learning Problems on Learning English

I taught my students in Banking and Finance study program at Politeknik Negeri Medan in the semester 6. On the first day of the week in the beginning of the semester my students and I just met in the classroom. At the first meeting I introduced about the syllabus, methods, communicative activities and other rules and regulations in class room and then started my lesson with the topic of ‘*Introduction*’. In this topic, the students talked about making a self-introduction. Before it got started, I introduced my self then I called their name one by one to know them better then I introduced the syllabus and topics to be discussed within the semester. After a few weeks, I got to know the students better by their names and started to observe their characters.

In general I found the students have diversities in characters among other students in many individual characteristics. Mostly the students were very quiet, shy, inhibited, low learning ability and were passive learners and listeners. The students only listened to the lecturer and were not even brave enough to give opinion or to put comments or to raise questions. They waited for the Lecturer to call their name in order to speak. I tried to find out why they behaved in this way. Through my observation in class, later I identified some problems faced by the students such as : (1) the students were inhibited; (2) the students had low self-esteem; (3) the students were lack of motivation; (4) had low risk-taking ability in a spoken language.

Method of increasing risk-taking ability

After I identified the students’ learning problems, I tried to solve their problems. The following learning problems are presented and methods used:

(1) the students were inhibited to speak

Inhibition by the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary definition is a feeling that makes one nervous and embarrassed, and unable to relax or behave in a natural way (Hornby 1995:613).

Brown said Anyone who has learned a foreign language is acutely aware that second language learning actually necessitates the making of mistakes; If we never ventured to speak a sentence until we were absolutely certain of its total correctness, we would likely never communicate productively at all (Brown 1994:139).

I found from several students why the students were inhibited to speak because they were afraid of making mistakes. The classmates often laughed at the student who made mistake in pronouncing the words, and this has made the students were lack of confidence. So the mistake was often viewed as threats. This student was descended from Batakist ethnic group who came from the village where they always use Batakist language ethnic group every day. This student usually has very accent of first language. This strong accent had influenced him from pronouncing the word in English. For example: What are the requirements to *open* a new bank account? The word open phonetically must be pronounced as [əʊpən] but it was pronounced [əʊpæn]. Batakist has strong phonetically sound of [æ] instead of [ə]. This strong accent of his/her first language had influenced his/her speech production of how the word is supposedly pronounced. As the result, the pronunciation sounded awkward and funny to the other students' ears. This condition made the students laughed at their classmate. Therefore, the students were inhibited to speak because they didn't want to be looked stupid, or being embarrassed by their classmates when making mistakes.

In the condition of this problem, I told the students not to laugh because they might make the same mistake. I encouraged the students in their learning to be brave to speak out and neglects whatever circumstances his/her classmates may behave. I drilled the students to practice the pronunciation and gave more examples of words which have similar sounds until they pronounced the word correctly. I told the students not to worry making mistakes, because learners learn from mistake. If the students never tried, they would never know they made mistakes and never know how to improve.

I also recommended the students to use English-English dictionary. The students can

look up the word and learn how the word is read and pronounced with its phonetic transcriptions. Other than that, I instructed the students to participate in the discussion when they were given tasks to do in class. I told the students that I would ask them after they had finished discussing. if the first student could not answer the questions, the other students will be given a turn to answer. I rewarded the students' when they could answer the questions and did well and made improvement in their study. I assured this atmosphere in their class happened. With this learning condition I made, the students could be risk-takers in many situations, because the students now became relax and not nervous anymore when they talked and expressed their ideas. As the result the students were willing to take part in the class and did well on learning English unconsciously.

(2) the students had low self-esteem

Self-esteem is according to Coopersmith cited by Brown, it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards himself (Brown 1994:137).

In general, I found the students had low self-esteem and were lack of self-confidence. Mostly these students were weak in structure or grammar and had limited vocabulary. For example the students did not know how the sentence(s) constructed correctly and this had made them were not able to produce sentences correctly, and also the students had limited vocabulary, and knowledge. All of these students' weakness had made them lack of confidence.

In the condition of this problem, I was patience and reviewed the structure and grammatical explanations or rules in which area the students were not capable to do the communicative activities. I wrote some points where the students made mistakes. I explained the structure and grammar after the students had finished practicing the conversation. This way aims to refresh students' mind as they have actually learned it before at school. In doing this review, I demonstrated the use and the usage of

the language expressions through its communicative functions and I gave them varieties of sentence pattern related to its communicative functions. I always encouraged the students to try out what they knew and took the risk of being wrong. By practicing the conversations with their pairs, the students may increase their self-confidence, because the students were given the opportunity to speak their learned language in English in real life situations. Because of these important reasons, as Woolfolk (2001) noted and advised that activities can be done in order to increase the confidence of silent students in the classroom; give plenty of practice in the class room.

In order to increase students' self-esteem, I asked the students to practice by using the imitation technique. With this technique the students repeated what they heard and the models of sentence pattern learned. When the students were capable enough to do the activities then I asked them to continue the practice by making analogy. With this analogy technique, the students were asked to create sentences by using the learned pattern drills. At last I asked the students to practice activities with analyzing technique. With this technique, the students were asked to create sentences and use the language of giving reasons. With these given techniques, I helped the students to rebuild their self-confidence and gradually they gain knowledge and skills and developed self-confidence. Finally, the students were able to produce words and sentences correctly and learned the language faster.

(3) the students were lack of motivation;

Motivation by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary definition is to cause somebody to want to do something (Hornby 1995: 758). According to Brown, motivation is commonly thought of as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action (Brown 1994:152). Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) had made studies of foreign language learners in Canada, United States and Philippines in an effort to determine how attitudinal and motivational factors affect language learning success. Motivation was examined as a factor of a number of different kinds of attitudes. They had put two clusters of attitudes divided two basic types of motivation: instrumental and Integrative motivation.

Instrumental motivation refers to motivation to acquire a language as means for attaining instrumental goals such as furthering a career, reading technical material, translation, and so forth. An integrative motive is employed when learners wish to integrate themselves within the culture of the second language group, to identify themselves with and become a part of that society (cited by Brown, 1994:153-154).

I found the students were lack of motivation. This problem was caused of the students were in semester 6 and they were tired and bored a little bit after they passed five semesters studied and were busy writing reports after doing their on the job trainings and started again writing final assignments before they were graduated. Having this kind of condition, the students were lack of motivation in learning English.

In the condition of this problem, I stimulated their motivation again by telling them if they have capability in English, they would be able to work in International organizations. I also gave them a suggestion of learning strategies and tried to create a good encouraging class atmosphere in the class to reveal risk takers. I gave challenging communicative activities for speaking in the forms of role-plays or simulation. These communicative activities gave the unmotivated students to participate from passive into active learners. I encouraged students to take risk by asking the students to practice the conversation. Before I conducted the communicative activities, I gave them the example. This example of the conversation I put in one particular situation and context, so the students can use their learned knowledge in real life situations. I picked up one topic related to the banking and finance context. Then next I asked the students to choose one of the topics listed in their handouts such as: Opening a new bank Account; Withdrawing Money; Making a Deposit; Enquiring about credit facilities, requirements and procedures; Applying for a credit card; Buying travelers' cheques; Exchanging foreign currencies. These activities, especially to improve students' oral skills, reduce anxiety level, and risk-taking ability improves. During the students practiced the dialogues with their partners, they looked more relax and not worried or nervous, because they

had more freedom to express out what they knew and thought. I walked around the class and took note for any area the students might make mistakes. After the practice, I wrote the mistakes on the whiteboard and asked if any student might know the answer. I encouraged the students to speak and say what they knew and thought about the answers. All the students' answers were written on the whiteboard and to be checked together. If they got stuck with the choice of words or sentence patterns and were not able to express out in a correct English grammar, then I helped. Finally, I wrote the correct answer on the whiteboard and the students copied. That was the way they increase again their motivation. If they got motivated, they would increase their risk-taking ability and became good risk-takers. Then I gave them language learning techniques, strategies, styles, and conducted the classroom as the student-centered and I told them being a risk taker in many situations would advantage the students in learning the language.

By doing this practice through the communicative activities, the students who never spoke in class or during conversational and oral practice before became motivated. I also conducted quiz and told the students if they could answer they would be given an additional score of English Subject. More students participated to answer the questions. I think this competition also has an important role to play in the development of oral skills, motivation during the language learning process. Over all activities, I gave the students feedback and specific praise.

I also asked the students to do assignments for the project work by interviewing the tourists. The students worked in group of 4 people. They conducted an interview to the tourists and recorded the conversation. The students were motivated to speak with the native speakers than with their classmates. The reason is because they were more relax and not to be looked stupid when making mistakes.

However, some of the students still were not motivated. I tried to identify the students' learning problem specifically concerning about their learning situation. After I found the problem, I used another method to help them and encouraged students to take risk (Oxford, 1992). I didn't scold the students, and didn't

put them in embarrassment or punishment and I also told the students not to sneer their classmates.

(4) had low risk-taking ability in a spoken language.

I found the students had low risk-taking ability in a spoken language. This situation happened because they didn't get enough practice and practice the language.

In the condition of this problem, I practically observed the students' behavior among some students in the speaking class. There were a few students were silent and looked like stressful throughout the lesson. After the lesson, I asked the reason why they did not participate in the conversations, their explanation was that their friends might laugh at them and this situation could disturb their psychology and learning enthusiasm. This is a common student thought about them.

I also found some students were talkative and sociable ones in their peer group. They were quiet because they didn't have ability to express out their ideas correctly and appropriately. Therefore they didn't dare enough to take a high risk in speaking with their lecturer or teacher or because the students did not want to be looked foolish in the classroom. I made sure to call on everyone, and gave each student a chance to practice until the students mastered how to use and know the usage of the language.

Beebe (1983) states that all of these three strategies are related to risk-taking, for example willing to guess is a part of risk-taking and willingness to appear foolish is willing to take risk. Therefore, I reinforced the students to be risk-taking, Furthermore, Beebe made another study about classroom participation and risk-taking ability, and tried to find the reason why L2 learners are shy a second language around peers or classmates from their mother tongue group than around native speaker and teachers is that they perceive the risk of looking foolish as a greater in the presence of peers from their own country.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, risk-taking has a significant role to the success in learning English. Risk-taking is a contributing factor associated with

willingness to make a try or experience, or to be wrong or to be embarrassed, or to gamble, not to be shy, to be active learners, to learn from mistakes, and not to be discouraged by making mistakes and appearing foolish.

Language teachers should be aware of who their students are, what the individual differences among their students are. Language teachers should establish an encouraging class atmosphere or a nonthreatening classroom climate in their classes to reveal risk takers. Language teachers should reward and respect to boost the students learning style. Language teachers should encourage students to be risk-takers in many situations and classroom should be student-centered. Language teachers should be patient to review the structure and grammar such as the use and usage of the language. The language teachers should stimulate the students' motivation by telling them if they have capability in English, they would be able to work in International organizations and give a suggestion of learning strategies and try to create a good encouraging class atmosphere in the class to reveal risk takers, and conduct communicative activities for speaking in the forms of role-plays or simulation. Language teachers should give each student a chance to practice until the students mastered how to use and the usage of the language.

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