

**LEARNER TRAINING PROGRAM SEBAGAI UPAYA
PENGEMBANGAN PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGRIS
DI UP2B UNIVERSITAS RIAU**

Masyhur

English Study Program of FKIP Riau University

Abstract: The need for language learner training arises from several circumstances, *learner differences, added value for teaching methodologies, practicality, educational aims, and learning-how-to-learn foreign languages*. It could be one valuable strategy to deal with problems currently being faced by the students at the Unit Pelayanan dan Pengembangan Bahasa (UP2B) Universitas Riau. The most urgent problem is that the students cannot regularly attend their English classes at the center because of the timetable clashes occurring at their faculties and the institute. To help overcome this practical problem, this paper argues for the introduction of a language learner training program. The design of the proposed language learner training program begins from external direction (an integral part of language learner training objectives), to semi-autonomy (partial part of the language program objectives), and ends in total autonomy (language learning activities at the self-access center). The design also includes psychological and methodological preparation for teachers and students to avoid possible negative attitudes due to their familiarity with teacher-centered classes. It is proposed that teacher training, prior to the implementation of language learner training, is also required. Teachers need to develop skills in need analysis, materials selection, and adopting a supportive facilitating role. This paper explores and makes recommendations as to why and how language learner training could be implemented in the tertiary context in Riau, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

The need for English among the students at tertiary level in Indonesia is extremely urgent. In order to respond such a need, efforts to improve English language teaching have been made. At Riau University, language instruction has been moved from the faculties to an institute especially established for

English language learning which is known as Unit Pengembangan dan Pelayanan Bahasa (UP2B) Universitas Riau. This institute is responsible for ELT to all the students at Riau University. The students are required to join the institute in addition to their regular classes at their faculties. The aim of the ELT at the institute is to develop the students' ability in using English for their advancement in their academic lives both while they are at the university and their future careers rather than only to satisfy a curriculum requirement. For this reason, the UP2B has undertaken some improvements. Such improvements can be seen in the implementation of new teaching methodologies and technologies. At least three groups of teaching approaches, those reflecting humanistic, cognitive and sociolinguistic approaches, have been under way. These three approaches have been used one after another, and even eclectic application of them has been implemented.

Despite such efforts, the number of students who can use English has not been as high as desired when measured using standardized tests like the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) where most of them score below 500. At first, the problem was thought to be the result of a mismatch between the methodologies and the context. It is reasonable to question the appropriateness of the language teaching methodologies which were developed by TESOL practitioners in countries such Britain, Australasia, and North America (BANA) (Holliday, 1994). Li (1998) argues that the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) which originates from BANA countries takes time and needs adjustment when applied in South Korea. South African teachers found it difficult to implement CLT in the African context (Holliday, 1994). The likely contextual mismatch, however, at Riau University has been avoided by the implementation of modifications to suit Riau context. The associations of English teachers meet for one week in a three-month period to adjust the teaching methodology. The modification can be seen from how the English teachers have changed the term of CLT to "PKG Approach." Thus, it could be said that a mismatch is no longer a significant problem in the application of the teaching methodologies as reported from Korea and South Africa.

Due to the reasons above, researchers turn their attention to training students to learn the language. The failure as described above could be caused

by the differences among learners who are taught using uniformed teaching methodologies. Rather than investing time on how the learners should be taught, focus should be put on changing the learner – on making the learner better learner. Writings describing this approach recommend that learner autonomy be included as an objective in language programs. They encourage teachers to help learners learn how to learn and outline methods for providing learner training (Wenden, 1991). The learner training should be inspired by the successful language learners.

The fact that there are differences among learners in the way they approach problems and learning task has long been recognized. It has been revealed by research that different learners approach a task with different sets of skills and preferred strategies. Experienced teachers often hear one learner say that he/she could not learn something until he/she has seen it, for example, written on the board or read from the books. Another learner would say this the other way round. He/she needs to hear something before he/she could learn it. Still another learner would need a physical action to grasp the lesson, or sometimes read the words aloud if he/she needs to understand something completely. These differences are often referred to as learning styles or preferred ways of learning. (Ellis, 1987; Brown, 1993; Lightbown and Spada, 1993). The difference in rate of learning is another fact the teachers see in classrooms. One learner learns more quickly than another because of his/her different language learning aptitudes (Dickinson, 1987).

In addition to learning styles and language learning aptitude, such factors as intelligence, personality traits, motivation, attitudes and age of acquisition would also result in differences among language learners. Various studies have revealed that intelligence may be more strongly related to certain kinds of second language abilities than others (Lightbown and Spada, 1993). Personality traits are also reported to affect language learning. Extroversion and responsiveness are personality traits which could contribute to the learners' success in learning a foreign language. Although there have been no significant findings on these factors, many believe that differences among learners affect second language learning (see for example, Brown, 1993; Lightbown and Spada, 1993; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1994). Motivation and attitudes are the other factors which create differences among the learners. It is generally

believed that motivated students would be successful in learning second languages in any condition because the motivation they bring to the class is the biggest single factor affecting their success (Harmer, 1991). Learners' attitudes toward the second/foreign languages could be either positive or negative. It is noted that the students with positive attitude would be more successful than those with negative ones (Dickinson, 1987). Age of acquisition is another factor. There may be a certain best age to learn a second language. For example, children seem to acquire the second language more easily when they learn it before puberty (Ellis, 1986).

Partly due to the unveiling of the learner differences, language classrooms have been shifted from teacher-controlled ones to learner autonomy. In fact, since the early 1970's, the trend in Western language teaching has been the learner-centered. This has been influenced by three groups of teaching practices; humanist, cognitive psychologist and sociolinguist. However, these teaching practices have not been fully learner-centered. Wenden (1991:2), for example, makes the point that

Teaching practices reflecting ideas from humanist and cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics can now be seen in many 'eclectic' classrooms. However, while three practices give the learners more central roles, in fact, they focus on teachers, striving to make them better by changing what they teach and how they teach.

On the other hand, learner-centeredness suggests that learners and their learning activities become the main construct of language teaching. They are viewed as important elements of the learners' success (Nunan, 1988). In addition, the three groups of teaching practices still elicit complaints from many English teachers. They have espoused one method or another, tried eclectic combinations of methods, or even eschewed methodology completely. Their language classes are still filled with poor language learners even though they are successful language learners in their first language (Chamot, 1987). The teachers have applied the most current methods, textbooks, and cozy classrooms, but still the number of poor second language learners cannot be decreased (Omaggio, 1986).

It is implicit in the illustration that there is no one perfect method in second language teaching. It should be noted, however, it does not suggest

that the current teaching methods are inappropriate. Rather they are insufficient to accommodate differences among learners. One method could be very suitable for one particular learner or context but not for another. Therefore, some language researchers have even gone further to investigate what make one become successful learners. Their findings are really striking.

Rubin and Thompson (1982) good language learners can be described as successful users of language learning strategies. They, for example, find their own way, taking charge of their own learning, organize information about language, make their own opportunities for practice in using language inside and outside the classroom

Other studies have examined the language learning strategies used by good language learners. The results have similar patterns. A research by Setiyadi (2001) suggests that most good learners prefer to use metacognitive strategies in learning English. Metacognitive strategies are activities which provide a way for learners to arrange their own learning process (Oxford, 1990). The activities include centering the learning, arranging and planning and evaluating the learning. The use of metacognitive strategies has significant effect on their achievement in learning English. The similar result has also been founded by Mistar (2001). He suggests that metacognitive strategies and social strategies are two dominant factors for good learners to be independent learners. Metacognitive strategies independently make plans for the good learners' activities as well as evaluate the program. On the other hand, social strategies independently enhance communicative interactions with other people.

A study by Bremner (1999) suggests that most good language learners in China prefer to use metacognitive and compensation strategies in their learning process. A similar study by Nisbet et al (2005) also finds that more students choose metacognitive strategies than other language learning strategies.

The research questions, which guided the researcher as he explores the literature relevant to language learner training are:

1. Why is language learner training desirable?
2. How could language learner training be implemented at the Tertiary Language Institute in Riau Province, Indonesia>

In order to answer the research questions, six minor questions will be explored. They are as follows;

1. What would the overall goals of language learner training be in Riau Province?
2. What are the learner training objectives of language learner training?
3. How could language learner training be incorporated into the language instruction? Would it be incorporated into the classroom or would the establishment of a self access center be appropriate?
4. What instructional methods could be used to implement language learner training?
5. How would language learner training change the role of the student and the teacher?
6. How could teachers be prepared to implement language learner training?

METHODOLOGY

There are two types of research in the area of language education in general and Teaching English as a Foreign Language in particular. They are primary research and secondary research (Nunan, 1992: Brown, 1988). This paper follows the second form of research, secondary research. The approach used to elicit information is based on a review of the literature related to language learner training and learner strategies as well as some information on other factors which could inhibit and facilitate language learning activities. A review of the literature will be used to formulate and support recommendations for the implementation of language learner training at the Riau University Language Center in Riau Province.

DISCUSSION

The Design of Language Learner Training

1. Overall Goals of Language Learner Training

The goal of learner training at Riau University Language Center is to equip the students to develop, refine, and expand their knowledge about and know-how for English and English learning process. With such knowledge and know-how, they will have the ability to take charge of plan, monitor and evaluate their language learning activities. The learners would become autonomous learners without any control from the teacher. In this way, it is

expected that the need for English among university students and graduates could be accommodated. It is also expected that the students would be able to transfer their language learning skills to other kinds of learning as many researchers have acknowledged that students would use their language learning skills to learn other subjects.

2. Objectives of Language Learner Training

In order to achieve the goals of language learner training, many objectives could be formulated. However, since this paper is based on secondary rather than primary research, only twelve objectives are proposed. Other objectives could be formulated as the programs are run at the language institute. The twelve objectives are formulated as follows:

The students will be able to:

1. identify what could facilitate and inhibit their language learning process. The students realize that such factors as their age, language aptitude, intelligence, motivation, personality, socio-cultural background, cognitive styles, learning styles are influential in their language learning.
2. identify their preferred way of learning. Through a prepared questionnaire by teachers at the language institute, the students know their learning's style preferences; whether they are visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group major, individual minor, etc.
3. take responsibility for their own learning.
4. voluntarily become manager of their own English language learning
5. search for and discover information about English language learning by themselves
6. develop ability to take appropriate risks and learn from mistakes.
7. determine their own targets and assignments and how best to achieve these.
8. evaluate the progress of their own English language learning
9. develop and further refine their person knowledge about English language learning and other learning
10. develop and use their strategic knowledge about English language learning and other learning.
11. develop and use their task knowledge about English language learning and other learning.

12. continue their language learning activities, though they have left the institute.

3. Incorporating Language Learner Training into Language Instruction

The goals and objectives stated earlier imply that both integrated and separate language learner training would need to be implemented. Since the idea behind this kind of learning program is institutionally new to the students and teachers, though it appears to be common at an informal level, the implementation should evolve. It needs to be gradually and carefully socialized. It is proposed that the implementation of the language learner training program would begin from initial classroom activities with external direction from teachers to total autonomy at a self-access center through three stages. Initially, language learner training would be an integral part of the learning program outlined in curriculum of the institute. Teachers would incorporate language learner training objectives into their conventional teaching. This stage is frequently referred to as “external direction”. Since the decision to choose time, place and materials is totally made by teachers. Then, language learner training activities (conventional learning) would be in classrooms; the other (language learner training) would be conducted through activities in the self-access center. This stage could be referred to as semi-autonomy. At this stage, the students are preparing themselves for autonomy. Eventually, language learner training would become a stand-alone course run in the self-access center. The students would be totally responsible for all decisions regarding their learning and the implementation of the decision.

4. Instructional Methods

The literature has highlighted three types of methods which can be used in running the language learner training, indirect, direct methods and cooperative learning. These three methods are applicable to language learner training at RiauUniversityLanguageCenter. In the implementation of the indirect method, the students will be involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating their language learning process. They will be trained to practice such involvement to find out what can facilitate and hinder their language learning, etc. In contrast to the indirect method, which is inductive and discovery-oriented, the direct method is used when there is a need to give orientation before the students begin their language learning activities. Using this method,

teachers model how a technique is used and why. This method will be used to train the students' cognitive and social-affective strategies, while the indirect method is concerned with metacognitive strategies.

Cooperative learning is used to encourage the students to use their English language for communicative purposes. The students will practice particularly the use of their learning-how-to-learn skills. The class could be divided into several groups and teachers could not attend to each group at a time. The students will be free to decide how they should learn the task. Integrated language learner training with a teacher's direction, for example, the students are encouraged to form a group of four, preferably those who are not their close friends to ensure that they will seriously use the target language in the cooperative activities. They are provided with materials that have already been separated into four parts. One student is responsible for the first part, the second student for the second part, and so on.

5. Roles of Students and Teachers

Learner training could imply a radical change in the students' role. The students should be ready to 1) share the burden of learning, 2) play crucial roles in decision making about curricula and goals, 3) learn on their own, and 4) take on active roles. These four radical changes of role have been included in the objectives of the learner training mentioned elsewhere in this chapter. The changes suggested that students become self-directed/autonomous language learners.

Such changes of role could be of resistance to the students in RiauProvince. Therefore, it needs to be coped with in the running of the language learner training program at RiauUniversityLanguageCenter. Before the students are involved in learning activities, they have to be psychologically prepared. The preparation has two objectives. One is to help learners gradually change their image about language learning. This could include the socialization of self-directed learning and a gradual change of their values about teachers and students' roles. The other is to demonstrate the feasibility of being independent of teachers, by first of all showing the fact that there are many self-educated and successful English users in this area, and secondly by inviting the student to undertake a small learning project. The feeling of purposeful and successful learning needs to be planted in the students' minds. Purposeful

learning is very dependent on the structuring of the learning. This includes identification of relevant objectives, their assembly into a realistic learning program, and provision of some means to inform the learner whether he/she is achieving his objectives (Dickinson, 1987).

As far as changes for teachers, there are two characteristics of roles which should be considered. Firstly, the teacher serves as a helper. He/she should be able to play a helping role. He/she should be the one with a warm and loving attitude and personality. He/she accepts and cares about the learners and their problems and takes them seriously. He/she is willing to spend time helping. He/she is approving, supportive, encouraging and friendly, and regards the learners as an equal. With the helping role, learners feel free to approach him/her and can talk freely and easily with him/her in a warm and relaxed atmosphere.

The other characteristic is regarding the teacher's perception of the learners' capability to plan and undertake their own learning. The teacher holds a belief that learners can make appropriate plans and arrangements for their learning. The teacher empowers learners to plan and undertake the learning and highly regards the learners' capability to plan their own work. This could be in contrast to what currently happens in the foreign language class in Riau where the teacher controls, commands, manipulates, persuades, influences and changes the learners. Under the new arrangement, the teacher is to listen to, help, consult with, accept, empower, interact with and responds to them. This role is also related to changing the teachers' perception of him/herself. They will no longer be a knowledge dispenser or a big boss.

6. Teacher Training

In order to implement language learner training at Riau University Language Institute, the teachers should be prepared. They need to gain better understanding of the concept behind language learner training and the importance of self-directed learning. The preparation is very important. The teachers have to have better understanding of the concept of a language learner training program in order that they could be certain what they need to do in the program. The preparation, for example, is aimed at helping the teachers hold beliefs that students, if properly trained, could take charge of their learning.

The literature has outlined that there are two kinds of preparation

teachers need in the running of the language learner training. The first preparation is referred to as psychological preparation. In this kind of preparation, they are introduced to the idea behind language learner training, the characteristics of the ideal helper, and the concept of self-assessment. The teachers should be provided with deeper understanding of language learner training such as its purpose, definition and description of the degree to which language learner training could be implemented for the students in this province. Preparation for the characteristics of an ideal helper concerns the relationship with the students. In language learning training, such relationship are radically transformed from their former roles. Finally, self-assessment preparation is related to the students' involvement in evaluating their progress in learning. Unlike formal assessment by teachers and examination boards used for certification, this is a type of assessment used by the learners to get information about their learning.

The second preparation is methodological preparation. This is related to skills in the implementation of the language learner training program. It is important to prepare their skills to implement the new programs. They need skills to do needs analysis, evaluate, adapt and prepare materials, manage a self-access resource, and train learners for language learner training. The skills for needs analysis include the teacher's ability to examine a needs analysis questionnaire and modify it to suit the situation, design a needs analysis questionnaire to be used by the students, and, design an interview schedule to elicit the students' needs. The skills for materials evaluation, adaptation and preparation include the construction and application of a text-book evaluation schedule into a course book. The skills for the training of learners include selecting a resource book for learners, suggesting the types of activities, and training the learners according to their needs. As the skills for specific training for language learning include sorting strategies, training specific learning strategies, and applying these strategies to language learning.

CONCLUSION

This paper has set out to examine the feasibility of establishing a language learner training program at Riau University Language Center Pekanbaru, Riau. It sought to answer two major research questions, why is a language learner

training program desirable and how could language learner training be implemented at Riau University Language Center?

The exploration of language learner training has made it clear that it could be valuable for several reasons; learner differences, added value for current language teaching methods, educational aims, learners' practical reasons and learning-how-to-learn foreign language. The design of language learner training is related to such factors as its goals, objectives, incorporation into language instruction, instructional methods, handling possible counter-productive attitudes to the role change of teachers and students and teachers' preparation. The language learner training program at Riau University Language Center seeks to help students acquire ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, enhance knowledge about language learning, including strategies for self-directed learning – their metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies.

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