

Revisiting Krashen's Hypothesis: Teaching EFL to Mixed-Level Non-English Major Student of Cenderawasih University, Jayapura-Papua

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Teaching English as a compulsory subject in Cenderawasih University has always been a challenging one. The situation and condition faced by the lecturers who are from English education program are complex. They have to teach English in the first year, sometimes until second year for non-English major students from different programs. At the same time, they deal with big classes from all programs. Issues in the teaching and learning process in the classroom may include total number of students, students' background knowledge of learning English, learning conditions, and teaching and learning style. Since these issues have happened throughout the years, several elements from Krashen hypothesis can be considered to help to create a better language learning environment. This study focuses on those elements of comprehensible input, reduced anxiety level, and active participation. These elements can be urgently suggested to English teaching and learning process at university level, particularly to teach EFL (English as a foreign language) to mixed-level non-English major university students to produce an effective language learning environment.

Keywords: Krashen hypothesis, mixed level, non-English major students, EFL

Introduction

Cendrawasih University (UNCEN) was established on November 10, 1962 in Jayapura, the capital city of Papua. Currently, there are nine faculties (Faculty of Teacher Training & Education, Faculty of Social & Science, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economy, Faculty of Mathematics & Natural Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, & Faculty of Sport Sciences) spread in two different locations.

English is a general course that must be taken by non-English major students. This course usually appears in every first semester or odd semester, commonly known on schedule as English 1. Some departments put also as a continuing course or English 2 in even semester.

I started to teach in 2008 right after graduating from Cenderawasih University from the Faculty of Teacher Training & Education in English education program. My first time teaching English as a general course was to engineering students from the Faculty of Engineering. At that time, I started as a teaching assistant. From the beginning of my teaching English in this particular class, I was surprised by the number of students in the

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classroom which was 60 students. The schedule I got was for one semester and we met only one day a week for only one hour and 45 minutes.

I try to portray the situation in my typical EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom at university level. These days, every first semester of year I have to teach English to non-English major students from the Faculty of Teacher Training & Education, the Faculty of Engineering, and the Faculty of Social & Science. During this academic year, I teach English for these students with total of 30—more than 100 students each class. The large class I have for this semester is from engineering class with 120 students. This situation is also happening to my colleagues who teach in other faculties.

Students who register in the first semester year in every faculty must take English as one of their requirement subjects. However, there has been no English pre-test before to know students' English ability so they can be put in different levels. Consequently, we always have students coming in English class with mixed-level situation.

Given position as one of the foreign languages taught from elementary level to university level, English is still a challenging subject for most of these students. At the university or college level, for example, students' ability in English is influenced by their learning process at school level.

As an English lecturer, I have never received any kinds of students' background information every time I teach English in this particular class from every faculty. I mostly ask for certain information regarding their English learning experience in their school time directly in the classroom. And the answers I have got from the students are varied. Some answered they did not really learn English well because of their English teachers' seldom came to class, and in another time the English teaching was monotonous. Others, especially those from rural areas experienced almost zero of learning English due to teacher's absences.

This is a narrative paper which I would like to tell about the situation and the problems of EFL mixed level class of non-English major students in Cenderawasih University, Jayapura-Papua.

Problems in Teaching EFL to Mixed-Level Non-English Major University Students

Teaching English as a compulsory subject in Cenderawasih University is very challenging for English education program lecturer, or for the writer as one of the lecturers. There have been several problems that need to be considered in teaching English to mixed-level non-English major students at the university. First, in every first semester, many teaching English requests come from several faculties to English education program lecturer. Most of the time, one lecturer can get two or three teaching schedule from different faculties. And each of these faculties has several study programs that put English on their schedule. The total number of students to be taught in English class is varied, ranging from 50 to more than 100 students.

Second, dealing with many students from different programs in every first semester means dealing with students' background knowledge. Many of these students are not only from the city, but also from rural areas. Their English ability is mixed from good, average, and poor. So, in every study program, this issue occurs yearly.

Third, the learning condition of EFL for mixed-level non-English major students in Cenderawasih University is mostly done in the classroom. In EFL setting, other than classroom, students do not use English for other purposes than learning. As a result, these students get exposure only from the lecturer in the classroom.

Fourth, teaching English for mixed-level non-English major students, particularly in large classes, needs extra effort in the teaching style and students' learning style. Deciding what strategies to be used in mixed level

class is often neglected by the lecturer. Moreover, students' learning style in mixed class can make a lecturer's job overloaded while deciding on which learning style is better to support the teaching.

The Suggestions of Three Elements of Krashen's Hypothesis

Having an experience of teaching EFL in mixed level class of non-English major students at university makes me realize that there are still lots of things to be considered to create a good language learning environment. Therefore, I would like to suggest to myself and also for my colleagues who teach English as a general course to reflect on their experience and think about Krashen's hypothesis.

There are three elements in Krashen's theory of language learning. I believe Krashen has several theories about language learning, however, I only focus on the comprehensible input, reducing students' anxiety level, and creating an active participation in the classroom. These three things are the things I think can help the EFL class for mixed-level non-English major students.

Comprehensible Input

According to Krashen (as cited in Brown, 2007), in input hypothesis, the exposure of language learners "should be just far enough beyond their current competence". His theory of " $i + 1$ " is obvious on the comprehensible input that a language learner is at stage or level i , his/her input should be on " $i + 1$ ". This can be also taken into EFL setting where EFL learners should be provided with a comprehensive input.

Providing comprehensible input means to ensure teaching and learning language in the classroom becomes more effective. For example, in teaching EFL for mixed level of non-English major students, adjusting materials to meet each of students' English ability is important. For some classes, the students are learning English as a general course, for others are more to ESP (English for specific purposes) material. There are actually no differences between teaching English as a general course and specific purposes, given the students' characteristics above. These mixed-level students need to be provided with comprehensible input.

Since, as I have mentioned before, there has been no pre-test to put students according to their English ability level, I need to design materials that cover all level of my students (high, mid, and low). This is also in relation to the " $i + 1$ " theory. Surely, my students may not be on the same stage, so I need to think about materials that can help students understand the language, and finally acquire it.

Reducing Students' Anxiety Level

Another thing to be considered in teaching EFL mixed level of non-English major students is to think about how to reduce their anxiety level in teaching English. Since students' English ability in mixed level class is varied, their learning in the classroom may affect their performance. Many studies have shown that there is a negative relationship between anxiety and academic performance. Krashen (1982) had described that "the Affective Filter hypothesis implies that our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter" (p. 32).

To reduce students' anxiety level in mixed level class, I need to ensure that the teaching and learning situation in the classroom is far from giving pressure to students. In EFL setting, I believe there should be not a lot of pressures on students. It will make them refuse further learning. Giving students a comfortable learning atmosphere does not mean to spoil them and then they forget what to learn. Nonetheless, creating a low anxiety learning situation where students can learn English effectively will help them in learning English. Furthermore, using different teaching methods in mixed level class is also fundamental to help to lower students' anxiety.

I believe that students' success in learning English depends on how the teaching takes place in the classroom. Therefore, to reduce students' anxiety in learning English, I need to think about providing materials in various ways and using different techniques that are fun but meaningful for them.

Active Participation

I believe that in order for my students to perform better, they need opportunities to interact and be active in the classroom. To accomplish this, I need to create a learner-centered classroom. In a learner-centered classroom, students can play an active role in the classroom and help their achievement of learning the language.

In line with Krashen's Affective Filter theory, encouraging students' participation in mixed level class should be done fairly. Since I have always been experiencing large class of mixed level class, classroom atmosphere of active participation is important. I should be able to encourage active participation and minimize forcing of wanting them to say something they are unwilling or not ready to say. Hence, I should teach them in accordance to their individual variations.

Conclusion

Based on my experience for almost five years in teaching English as a general course to mixed level in Cenderawasih University, Jayapura-Papua, I feel that the problem has always been there: the large number of students in classroom, students' background knowledge, students' learning conditions, and teaching and learning style.

Therefore, a change is necessary to create effective language learning for this particular class by looking at Krashen's theory. I would like to suggest three elements of comprehensible input, reducing students' anxiety, and creating an active participation in class. I believe these things can help me in dealing with EFL teaching to mixed-level students of non-English major in my place.

Given the fact that teaching mixed-level students of non-English major requires lots of preparation and energy, I think one can try to keep in mind and apply Krashen's theory of language learning. I, myself, believe that providing comprehensible input, reducing students' anxiety, and encouraging active participation can help to create a better language learning environment for mixed level class of non-English major students in Cenderawasih University, Jayapura-Papua.

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