
DEVELOPING POSITIVE ATTITUDES IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

For most students, English is considered as a difficult subject. They think that they cannot master English because English is a difficult subject. This belief influences the way students study English. Because of this belief, they are reluctant to study English. When one day they get a score of fifty in their English examination, they think that this score is good enough. They do not have the spirit to get higher scores and to master English. This paper tries to explore ways of developing positive attitudes in learning English because it is believed that the difficulty in learning English is not caused by the language itself but by the negative attitudes in learning English. By developing positive attitudes in learning English, it is expected that students will be interested in learning English and finally they will be able to master English.

Keywords: *positive attitudes, learning English*

INTRODUCTION

In this global era, the mastery of a foreign language, especially English, is very important. People will not be able to communicate easily with others if they do not master a foreign language. And, one language that is most widely used in this world is English. Therefore, people need to learn and master English.

In Indonesia, English has been taught from junior high schools. Even in the previous curriculum, English could be taught starting from the elementary schools. This is done with the expectation that the young generation will be able to use English for their communication with people from other countries. They are also expected to be able to develop themselves, for example through reading books written in English.

Although English has been taught from junior high schools, the fact shows that even university students find difficulty in communicating with others using English. From the start of the meeting with English, most of them think that English is a difficult subject. Usually, this is based on the stories from the previous generation, that is, their failure in mastering English.

If students do not master English, is it because English is a difficult subject or are there other factors which influence their learning so that they cannot master English? If English is difficult, how can common people like a *becak* driver and a taxi driver master English? Are the *becak* driver and the taxi drivers clever people so that they can master English?

This paper tries to explore why students have difficulty in mastering a foreign language such as English. This paper also tries to explore ways which can be done by teachers and students in their efforts so that students can master English well.

What makes students think that English is difficult?

There are always questions which are often asked by learners about their learning English. This question is “Why is English difficult?”. Is it true that English is difficult? Is it only English that is difficult to learn? What about other foreign languages? What about Indonesian? Is Indonesian easy or difficult? More and more questions can be asked related to whether a language is easy or difficult to learn.

To answer such above questions, some may say that English is difficult because it is a foreign language. So, what about Indonesian or the mother tongue? The fact shows that for some people, especially the young generation, the mother tongue is also not an easy language to learn. For example, Javanese young generation have difficulty in learning Javanese, especially the very formal Javanese called *Kromo Inggil*. Therefore, it can be concluded that the difficulty in learning a language is not because a language is a foreign language. There must be something else which makes a language difficult to learn.

Based on the above example, there must be something else to be believed as the cause of the difficulty in learning a language. One of the causes is what Leaver, et al. (2005: 92) call *foreign language anxiety*. Learners may have the fears and uncertainties when they learn a language, not only a foreign language, but also a native language as mentioned in the example above. This feeling has caused them to think that they cannot master the foreign language. This feeling can also become an obstacle for learning a foreign language.

Further, Leaver, et al. (2005: 93) argue that there are several reasons why learners have such an anxiety. Some of them are: the amount to learn, the difficulty in communicating at lower levels, and the self-consciousness about mistakes.

In order for someone to master a foreign language, a lot of things need to be learned. This has become the reason why learners think that they do not have enough time and it is impossible for them to master the foreign language. Even worse, they think that there are so many differences between their mother tongue and the foreign language, the differences in the vocabulary, in the pronunciation, and the difference in grammar.

Learners may also have problems in communicating. They have difficulty in trying to communicate using the language they are learning. They do not master the expressions used for expressing their ideas and thoughts. This is even worse since, as teenagers or adults, they have a lot of concepts or ideas which they want to express.

Another obvious problem which may hinder learners in learning a foreign language is related to mistakes. Learners may make mistakes in their learning. The problem is that they do not think that making mistakes in learning a foreign language is a natural process, but they think that they should be perfect in using the foreign language, no mistakes at all. In the classroom, the situation may be even worse because there are the teacher and the other friends who judge the performance. They may feel ashamed in front of their teacher and friends. They

may think that mistakes in communicating may be considered as something very bad and should not happen. They may stop trying to communicate in English if they feel that their friends make fun of them. Such a feeling may block the desire to learn a foreign language.

Models of common people who can master English

Some may think that learning English is difficult but for some others, learning English is not that difficult. In the following part, models of common people who can master English will be presented. The videos of the models can be downloaded from *youtube*.

The first model is a five-year-old girl from Batak who can speak English. Her name is Sevenly Tumanggor. It is said that this young girl has not taken an English course. Yet, she can speak English fluently, of course with some mistakes here and there.

The second model is a *becak* driver. His name is Herman, a very old man. He can speak English quite fluently although he also makes mistakes in his English. For example, he says "...until there" which is the translation of "...*sampai di sana*".

The third model is a taxi driver. His name is Tarnedi. He is a middle-aged man. He even did not graduate from an elementary school. He tries to develop his English speaking ability by speaking English with his customers.

The fourth model is a very young girl who can speak 22 languages. The video of this young girl can also be downloaded from *youtube*. It seems that the video was recorded in Bali, Indonesia. This young girl sells souvenirs and she can use 22 languages to promote the souvenirs to tourists.

From the four models presented above, what can be concluded? What makes those common people able to speak English? If it is true that English is difficult to master, those common people must not be able to speak English. So, it must not be about whether the language is difficult or easy to master. There must be something else which can encourage those common people to learn English. This must be related to their attitude towards learning a foreign language, especially English.

Positive Attitude towards Learning English

From the models presented above, it is believed that attitudes play an important role in a person's desire and willingness to learn English. Attitude which is defined as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Albaracin, 2005: 4) has a great influence on the process of learning English. The learners' attitude can affect the way they see everything around them. When they have positive attitude, this will have an influence on the efficiency and success of the learning process (Leaver, et al., 2005: 93).

Further, Keller (2001, 14) provides the differences between a person with negative attitudes and the one with the positive attitudes. The person with the negative attitudes thinks that he or she CANNOT do something while the person with the positive attitudes thinks that he or she CAN. The person with the negative attitudes sees limitations while the person with the positive attitudes sees possibilities.

Ways to Develop Students' Positive Attitudes

As students may develop negative attitudes towards their learning, it is the duty of teachers to develop positive attitudes on students. McDonald & Hershman (2010: 81) suggest teachers to use a sparkling introduction called an anticipatory set which is used to grab students' attention. This can develop students' positive attitudes towards their learning. Students need to be told that having positive attitudes can be a starting point for achieving their goal in learning English, that is, to master English.

McDonald & Hershman (2010: 81) argue that there are some ways which can be used by teachers to achieve the opening. The first way is by manipulating objects. For example, the teacher can ask students to conduct a simple experiment.

The second way is to use humor. It is believed that using humor is good for creating a good and conducive atmosphere in the class. Humor can create fun in the learning process and when students feel that they have fun in the class, they will not even leave the class (McDonald & Hershman, 2010: 171). Having the enjoyment of learning can be one way for developing intrinsic motivation which is useful for learners' learning process (Jordan, et al., 2008: 154)

For certain teachers, they may think they cannot use humor. It is because they are not humorous. However, in this era, it is not difficult for teachers to find humor in different forms. For example, they can use cartoons or funny video clips which can be downloaded from the Internet. They can use funny or unique pictures. The development of technology can help teachers find such funny and unique pictures. Some social media members often broadcast funny and unique pictures which can be used by teachers for creating humor in the class. Funny stories can also be used to provide humor in the class. However, teachers need to be cautioned that not all funny pictures can be used in the teaching learning process. They must be selective in choosing which pictures can and cannot be used in the teaching learning process.

Another way which can be used by teachers to grab students' attention and to develop their positive attitudes is by presenting interesting facts. Students like to hear about something interesting. This is especially useful as a start in the teaching learning process so that they are ready to be involved in the teaching learning process.

Another way suggested by Leaver, et al. (2005: 95) which can be used for developing positive attitudes is by reframing. What does this mean? Reframing means trying to see something threatening as something helpful. In the previous part it is discussed that many students think that learning English is difficult. They are also afraid of making mistakes. If students consider making mistakes as something threatening, they will not learn. However, if they consider making mistakes as a natural part of the learning process and they realize that if they do not make mistakes, they are not learning as much as they can, then this is what is called reframing. They must hold the belief that the more they make mistakes, the more opportunity they have for learning and, therefore, for mastering English. Students need to be encouraged to make mistakes and teachers need to be tolerant to students' mistakes. Teachers must also believe that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. If they are not tolerant to students' mistakes, the students will again develop negative attitudes towards their learning. One way to develop tolerance to students' mistakes in learning English is by realizing that

students, and even teachers, also make mistakes in the communication using Indonesian.

Another way to develop students' positive attitudes is by using inspirational quotes. There are a lot of inspirational quotes which can be downloaded from the Internet. The only thing that the teachers need to do is select the quotes which IS inspirational and can develop students' positive attitudes. For example, "Your success in life begins and ends with your attitude" can be one example of an inspirational quote which can be used to develop positive attitudes. The quotes can be presented at the beginning or at the end of the lesson. Or, teachers can ask students to provide a kind of slogan to be posted on the wall. For example, "Don't be afraid of making mistakes". "Learn by making mistakes", "Never give up", etc. Such quotes and slogans need to be repeated again and again so that the students will be encouraged to develop positive attitudes.

Teachers can also develop students' positive attitudes by accepting simple expressions used by students. As mentioned before, students may have difficulty in using English to express their ideas and feelings, especially using long and complex expressions. When the teachers accept the use of simple expressions, of course, the students will feel relieved and relaxed. They are not afraid of making mistakes and they are not afraid of being judged as incompetent students.

A Caution about Positive Attitudes

Having positive attitudes does not mean that learners will be free from problems. Of course, there can be some problems found in learning English. However, with the positive attitudes, students can be persistent in trying to achieve their goal of mastering English and they can also be able to reframe the negative attitudes into the positive attitudes. They will also be able to find ways to overcome the problems. In this way, they can do better in their learning.

Another point which needs to be taken into account is that it is not enough to have positive attitudes at a time. Positive attitudes need to be developed all the time. Teachers can give a great influence on students by giving criticism or encouragement. That is why teachers are also encouraged to use positive words in their teaching so that students will also develop positive attitudes.

Last but not the least, when students only have a little positive thinking, they will not be able to get high achievement. This means that students need to develop positive attitudes all day long. There is no day without having positive attitudes.

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