

INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

Mutiara Ayu

Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia
Lampung, Indonesia

Abstract: Involving students to participate in overcrowded classrooms activities is a challenging problem faced by teachers. They may spend much time to make students pay attention and concentrate on managing classroom activities. In Indonesia, many classrooms still go beyond thirty students, and it is common to be more than forty students in a class. As a result, the students are halfhearted and reluctant to participate actively in classroom activities. Promoting interactive activities such as forcing students' engagement in group discussion and presentation seem to be alternative ways to aid students to learn English in a meaningful way and make them communicate effectively in English during teaching and learning process. Thus, the aim of this paper is to highlight some interactive activities for effective learning which can motivate and engage students with learning activities and create their interest in learning English in overcrowded classrooms.

Keywords: Interactive Activities, Overcrowded Classroom

INTRODUCTION

Overcrowded classroom has been considered one of the most challenging problems faced by teachers. The rising population has caused class size to soar. According to National Council of Teachers of English Guidelines of California, class size would be capped at 15-20 students especially for English as a foreign language classes. It is stated in the rule of national education ministry number 41, 2007, that is, Indonesian government suggests that the number of students in every class should be 28 students for elementary school (SD/MI), and 32 students for the secondary school and high school. This number is expected to be the ideal, so the process of learning and teaching at school will be more effective and all students can achieve the expected competences. Unluckily, many classrooms now still go beyond thirty students, and it is common to be more than forty students in a class.

Moreover, overcrowded classrooms may create a barrier in the activities of teaching and learning process. In the classroom, the goal of teachers is to treat every student in a proper way in order to control the activities and to give their students a widest chance to develop their skills and potentialities at the optimum level. For that reason, classroom is considered important sites of intellectual and individual development (Blatchford et al., 2007) because many classroom activities created through classroom interaction occur

between teachers and students and among students. This can be best achieved when the students are properly motivated by creating interactive activities.

However, reality shows a pathetic fact that some students who have learnt English for more than ten years still cannot communicate in English fluently and effectively and reach the goals of learning English. It can be observed that some students have a lack of motivation and practice in using English in the classroom. Consequently, they are reluctant to participate, involve, interact and improve their skills in English. In this case, motivation is a crucial factor in learning language for students. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have pointed out, it is essential foundation for the initiation of the cognitive process. The higher the motivation of the teacher and students, the better will be the achievement in language learning.

This situation also indicates that the teachers of English may not have provided enough chances to students for improving their English skills. Besides, in overcrowded classrooms, teachers may spend most of their time in demanding students' attention or concentrating on classroom activities to manage students' activities in a proper way and they also may not properly use teaching strategies. Teachers lose valuable lesson time in such circumstances, because they spend most of the lesson time trying to control the learners so little time is left for real teaching (Imtiaz, 2014). Therefore, for many students, language learning becomes boring and sometimes a burden too.

Furthermore, giving instruction is also a challenging task to every teacher who teaches in overcrowded classroom. Since the number of students in overcrowded classroom is big, teachers feel very difficult to manage their teaching learning process in an effective way in order to attain the specified goals of teaching. At the same time, teachers cannot make adequate interaction among the students in a large group. Thus, it can be concluded that interactive activities are necessarily needed to teach students in overcrowded classroom effectively and as a result, the aim of this paper is to highlight some interactive activities for effective learning in overcrowded classroom.

Interaction and Its Importance in Language Classroom

Interaction is an elicitation of willing student participation and initiative which requires a high degree of interpersonal communication skills (Rivers, 1987, p. 10). It refers to the exchange of information between the teacher and the students or among the students. It has long been considered important in language learning. "It may be quiet; it may be noisy; it may be alert and dynamic; it may take place in large groups, small groups or pairs" (Kramsch, 1987, p. 18). It will make students deeply involved in activities that draw on their creativity.

Teachers should demonstrate these qualities to students to help them overcome their inhibitions and fear of embarrassment. According to Swain (1985), interaction allows the learner to practice the target language, thus enhancing fluency, to notice or trigger a particular structural form that needs modifying and to test hypotheses about structural points. Similar to Swain, McLaughlin (1987) point out that interaction provides opportunity for the non native speaker to practice structural components, increasing the likelihood of atomicity of such components.

According to Brown (1994), interactive activities have some beneficial features, that is, there is a large amount of pair and group work, students engage themselves in spontaneous and authentic conversations, students work for actual audiences and purposes, not artificial ones, and the task-based activities prepare students for the real world outside of the classroom. Through interactions, students can increase their language repertoire as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material, or even the output of their fellow students in discussions, skits, problem-solving tasks or conversations.

At the time of interaction, students can use all they have learnt of the language or have casually absorbed in real life exchanges where expressing their real meaning is important to them. Thus, they will have experience in creating messages from what they hear or read, since comprehension is a process of creation (Rivers, 1981). It is also underscored by Richards (2001) that second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.

Types of Classroom Interaction

There are two types of interaction teacher-students interaction and student-student interaction. Thurmond (2003) defines interaction as the students' engagement with the course content, other learners, and the instructor in the course.

Teacher-Students Interaction

This type of interaction as Coulthard (1977) mentions has received a great deal from teachers in a wide range of disciplines. It happens between the teacher and one student or many other students. The teacher negotiates with students the content of the materials, asks questions, uses students' ideas, lectures, gives directions, criticizes or justifies students' responses. During teacher-students interaction, the students seek to demonstrate their speaking and listening skills in front of their teachers that is why, the teacher should take into account the way of interacting that is very crucial in learning and teaching.

According to Harmer (2009), teachers should focus on three things when they talk with their students. Firstly, they must pay attention to the kind of the language the students are able to understand, so it is comprehensible for the level of all the students. Secondly, the teachers must think about what they will say to their students, hence the teacher speech is as a resource for learners knowledge. Finally, teachers also have to identify the ways in which they will speak such as the voice, tone and intonation.

Student-Student Interaction

This type of interaction in the second language classroom is used so that it can create opportunities for students to participate in less structured and more spontaneous language use to negotiate meaning and draw on their own prior knowledge to actively communicate with others. Johnson (1995) supports that if student-student interaction is well structured and managed, it can be an important factor of educational achievement of students and social competencies. It can also develop the learners' capacities through collaborative works. Therefore, learners will establish social relationship through this kind

of interaction, where the sense of learning community is promoted and isolation is reduced in the classroom. Naegle (2002) states that talking students with their peers about the content of the course is a powerful way for them to reinforce what they have learned. Teachers then must encourage such type of interaction between students because it is among the fastest ways that promotes active learning and reduces passiveness between students.

Strategies for Promoting Interactive Activities

Interactive activities provide opportunities for students to use English in a communicative way for meaningful activities rather than form such as correctness of language and structure. It will lead students to acquire what they need and what they want actually to be used in real life situations. Thus, interactive activities include any activity in which a participant addresses an audience orally.

Lee (2004) says that promoting interactive activities seems to be an alternative means to help the foreign language learners to acquire the target language in a meaningful way. It is believed that by means of interaction, foreign language learners can stretch their linguistic competence and use appropriate strategies to modify and negotiate meaning in spite of their inaccurate and incomplete utterances.

In EFL classrooms, the learning environment also supports students' motivation to participate in group or individual learning activities. When students are placed in classes with small numbers, they are more involved and academic achievement increases. This is supported by Ikediaskhi and Amaechi (2012), who point out that small number of students can result higher quality education. They came to this conclusion after research conducted in Nigerian primary schools. In overcrowded classrooms less attention can be given to individual learners and it is difficult to motivate them. Overcrowded classrooms tend to be teacher-centered, teachers react and learning is passive, with the result that learners may lose motivation.

Ikediaskhi and Amaechi (2012) highlight the fact that the reality of overcrowded classrooms results in students' lack of motivation to participate in group or individual learning activities. In classrooms with small numbers, it is easier for teachers to motivate students and ensure each student's involvement in academic activities

Forcing students' engagement in class is one way to keep them concentrated with the presented task in class. EFL teachers have to find the appropriate way or strategy to keep his learners more attentive, thus, fosters classroom interaction. Moreover, student engagement is viewed as the ability to encourage students to learn (Harlin, Roberts, Briers, Mowen, & Edgar, 2007). Teachers who encourage students to learn are viewed as having teaching efficacy beliefs, that is, they believe in their abilities to produce desired student learning. (Wolters & Daugherty, 2007) found that teachers' sense of efficacy was best conceptualized as three related dimensions reflecting teachers' sense of efficacy for instruction, management and engagement.

Additionally, the teacher's sense of efficacy for student engagement suggests the conviction of an individual that he/she assists students to become and remain involved, invested or motivated for learning. Students who are not engaged and not interested in learning are easily discouraged, therefore, teachers who can motivate them to learn are

needed. A great deal of English as a foreign language research emphasizes motivation's importance for engaging students in learning tasks. Motivated students are focused and engaged as they learn. The ability to motivate involves knowing what kinds of tasks support and feedback encourage students to put forth effort and strive to improve (Darling and Baratz, 2006).

Engaging students in learning is important; various researchers agree that students should participate and make decisions that will benefit them in their careers. Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) classified 44 studies of engagement into three categories: behavioral engagement encompasses doing work and following the rules, that is, emotional engagement includes interests, values, and emotions; and cognitive engagement incorporates motivation, effort, and strategy use. Engaging students into the learning process, can reduce a great amount of certain problems teachers are facing the class especially in overcrowded classes.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Overcrowded classrooms have been considered as one of the most challenging issues facing teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The lack of interaction between teachers and students is one of the problems that overcrowded classrooms may cause. However, the teachers need to view overcrowded classrooms from a different perspective and recognize that despite many disadvantages they can also provide many opportunities for teaching and learning process. The teachers need to enhance their innovative awareness and capabilities for developing effective and interactive activities for dealing with overcrowded classrooms. The overcrowded classrooms should not be an excuse of not to find out an appropriate strategy to create effective and interactive activities or to apply for solutions for improving teaching learning process. They also need the cooperation with the students to build active interaction for effective learning which can motivate, engage and create interest in learning English among students in overcrowded classroom.

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