Factors Influencing TESOL from a Learner's Perspective

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Abstract: This article will illustrate a typical English learning activity in an English training institution in Australia. Several international students, age ranging from 18 to 25 years old, were included in this study. All of these students are Asians, needing to improve their English level. Majority of the students come from Indonesia, Philippines, and China. The students attend the institution to improve their English skills before commencing their studies in Australian universities. There are 15 students from China and 5 students from other Asian countries, among which 12 are female students and 8 are male students. As the teachers are from China, some of them have a typical Chinese accent, while others have British or American accent. These are the context and setting of TESOL. From the perspective of one of the learners, an international student from China who had just arrived in Australia, the English learning context is general and typical in Australia, and there are also some common issues in learning in the context of TESOL. One of the issues is that students are quiet and do not actively respond to questions posed by the teachers. Another issue in TESOL is that most students are too shy to use English to communicate in the classroom.

Keywords: TESOL; Learning

1. Specifying the learning activity

The goal of TESOL is to assist international students develop their English reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, as well as to help them adjust to their university life and studies in Australia. Listening, reading, speaking, writing, and vocabulary are all part of the learning curriculum. The vocabulary is drawn from various fields, such as medicine, education, biology, environment, and other professional subjects. Before classes begin, the students are required to watch some videos and films about animals. These videos, as a vivid input, help learners learn new concepts and the subject itself. The students are also required to preview the unit content, which includes listening and reading [1].

Each unit has one topic from these different subjects. For instance, given the topic of the first unit is biology, listening, reading, speaking, and writing are all related to biology, and the vocabulary is also from the biology field, such as prey, predator, hibernation, and so forth. The first exercise is listening. The students are required to listen to a tape and take notes. After listening, the students will come to understand that the main topic is about an animal – puma. Following that, slides with pictures of puma, explaining their habitat, prey, predator, and so on are shown to the students. From those activities, students will be able to familiarize with the terms in biology and gain knowledge about the animal [2].

The second exercise is reading. There are two to three passages to read, and one of passages is a literary work. Classical literature is essential for communicating and expressing oneself. By reading the passages, the students can expand their vocabulary and learn new sentences in relation to biology. The essential goal is to discuss the literature without any evaluation. This promotes interaction among students, which aids in the retention of reading information.

The third exercise is speaking. The goal of speaking is to encourage students to practice the accent and pronunciation of English in relation to a topic. The students are divided into small groups, and they are encouraged by the teacher to form interactions with each other. The speaking topic is on visiting the zoo or a certain mammal. Oral expression is an important aspect in English learning as most students struggle with speaking, By conversing with each other, learners can improve their pronunciation. The students are also required to communicate in social settings. This is usually assigned as a homework, but it is difficult to determine if it has been completed properly [3].

The final exercise and the most difficult is writing. The topic is about any kind of animal. In order to write, the students need to use the words, sentences, and knowledge that they have learnt from the previous three exercises. An additional assessment assigned to the students is to post their own writing on the website. The goal of this assessment is to promote their autonomy and practice English in social settings.

2. Motivation

There are significant differences between the motivation for learning a second language and the motivation for learning other subjects. The motivation to learn English as a second language is, to great extent, influenced by the learner's previous learning experience and the culture of the second language. For example, in TESOL setting, some students are hesitant to use English in public because their professors have previously assessed that they have an unusual accent. As a result, their motivation to speak English is relatively low. The motivation to acquire a second language has a social component in a certain social setting. It is closely linked to self-evaluation, new cultural behaviour, and certain negative emotions. It is an intricate factor that has a significant influence on second language learning [4].

According to experts, there are many different types of motivations, and each motivation plays an essential part in TESOL. According to Dornyei and Cohen, motivation can be divided into two types based on purpose and goal: instrumental orientation and integrative orientation [4,5]. Clearly, these students have both motivations: they need to learn English for their future career and engage with the English community on a regular basis. Each student has his or her own motivation to learn English, but the final goal is the same; that is, to use and practice in real social settings. It is difficult to decide which motivation is stronger, either instrumental orientation or integrative orientation. However, regardless of which is stronger, teachers should encourage their students to be enthusiastic in English learning.

Dornyei proposed that the motivation for L2 learning is influenced by the attitude of both, teachers and learners, as well as the learners' effort [5]. Students tend to participate in the learning activity more actively if the teacher has a good teaching attitude, such as offering encouragement and positive feedbacks. Learners are perceptive to their teacher's emotion, facial expressions, and body language. Hence, teachers should be aware of this point. Negative emotions greatly affect learners. Teachers should avoid using negative evaluation as much as possible. Ellis claimed that self-regulation, as an important part of motivation, plays a key role in second language learning. If students can govern and monitor their own learning process as well as change or modify their learning strategies after reflecting, their improvement in English learning will be significant. Self-regulation necessitates a high level of self-control. Generally, if a learner has strong self-regulation ability, he or she will excel in English language acquisition.

According to Dornyei [5], there are at least seven different dimensions of motivation for second language learning. One of them is motivation in the educational context, which is essential for English

language learning. If most students prefer silence, the overall classroom atmosphere will be quiet, with minimal interaction. If the education environment is dynamic, quiet students may be influenced by it and thus engage more in communication.   Teachers can influence the classroom environment in several ways. Another important dimension is self-concept [5]. Each learner has different self-confidence level and extend of language learning anxiety. If a student has higher self-evaluation and self-confidence levels, he or she may perform better in second language learning and have less anxiety. Teachers have a huge influence in this aspect. Attempting to encourage and support learners, such as by smiling, helps reduce their anxiety [5].

In order to improve the motivation for second language learning and transform the quiet TESOL classroom, teachers should first create suitable conditions and environment for learning [3]. Teachers should emphasize the importance of English learning and create a pleasant learning space to support students. The TESOL classroom should be a friendly and open space for discussion, where students feel accepted and are encouraged by teachers and other learners. If they feel comfortable and relax, they will participate more actively in the classroom. In order to boost students' motivation, the educational content should be relevant to real-life experiences and their future education. The educational content should pique students' interest in learning and make them aware of the aim in a social context. Meanwhile, it is critical to protect the students' self-esteem, especially when errors are made. Teachers should stress the benefits and advantages of learning a second language to dramatically boost motivation.

3. Learner autonomy

According to Benson, learner autonomy essentially implies that students are accountable for their own learning process; they take control of the entire learning process and achieve an acceptable result. Learners should have three types of controls over their learning process: cognitive process control, learning content control, and learning management control. These controls are interdependent and comprise the leaner autonomy [1]. Learners may have one or all three capabilities, which are defined by their cognitive level. Hence, Littlewood proposed a level of autonomy in which willingness and capability are both included. If the learning environment does not encourage learner autonomy and autonomous thinking, students will not exercise or apply their autonomous capability. In most East Asian countries, teachers are responsible for promoting learning activities, whereas students only need to follow blindly and take notes. Learner autonomy cannot exist in this context. It requires a suitable context with the promotion and encouragement by teachers. In regard to TESOL, teachers should always encourage students to think independently, speak boldly, and learn linguistic content autonomously through the internet or television. This provides a friendly and positive environment for learner autonomy. Students are encouraged to tell short English stories, recite English poems, or sing English songs to improve their English-speaking skills. Learners who are more independent in English learning will be more autonomous in practice [6].

In regard to the relationship between culture and learner autonomy, Benson asserted that in some Asian countries like China, teaching and learning activities are constantly focused on examinations and grades; hence, learner autonomy cannot be triggered. If the educational objective is learner autonomy, traditional cultures may be a negative factor in some countries, particularly for Asian students [1]. In view of the collectivism and respect for authority in Asian culture, Asian students may feel uncomfortable about the concept of learner autonomy, even if they are encouraged by their teachers. In China, practically all headmasters, teachers, and parents place a premium on learning outcomes, such as examinations and grades. Learner autonomy is undervalued, and the emphasis is on knowledge acquisition. Students enjoy taking notes and believe that teachers are always accurate. Despite the fact that some students practice learner autonomy, both teachers and parents assume that they do not have the capability to learn on their own. This phenomenon can be attributed to the traditional Chinese culture. In the context of TESOL, teachers are striving to improve and promote learner autonomy as much as they can. It is a challenge to break the reliance

of students on teachers. Compared with students from China, students from Indonesia and Philippines participate actively in classes, but Chinese students tend to remain silent due to the typical traditional Chinese classroom culture. Therefore, it is a challenge for teachers in TESOL. Teachers should constantly encourage their students to take part in discussions and to express their views clearly.

Reading classical literature is a way to promote learner autonomy [7]. Learners gain independent-thinking skills, reading skills, and interactive skills through reading and discussing these texts. Literature reading is an important part in TESOL because it only improves learners' reading skills and vocabulary, but also promotes the interaction among students. Students may freely express their point of view as there is no correct answer in literary discussions [7]. It has the potential to encourage learners to participate more actively. Illes also asserted that computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is suitable for developing learner autonomy. In TESOL, students are required to write short stories and post them on the online forum or the school website. This activity encourages students to express themselves more regularly and develop autonomy. Furthermore, this method integrates English learning into the lives of learners, helping them to develop their English skills in real life [7]. English language learning is a complicated long-term process; it is not just a classroom experience. CALL projects may make English language learning more practical and useful in everyday life [7]. In the context of TESOL, the students are encouraged to express their own interests, such as sports, music, travel, and so forth. Learners may have more autonomy if they are engaged in the topic. By implementing CALL, students can overcome their shyness and communicate with each other [7].

4. Learning strategy

According to Chamot and Cohen [2,3], learning strategy plays an essential role in English learning. It provides methods and instructions to the less successful language learners to help improve their English skills. Especially for second language learning, Chamot claimed that the first language has a distinct function. For example, in the setting of their native language, students can achieve a greater depth in learning certain academic and complex subjects, such as geography and mathematics. By using the first language to explain complicated concepts and procedures, students will be able to gauge the points accurately when teachers continue with English reading. In other words, first language is a useful tool for second language learning. In the context of TESOL, the students are required to read English materials, some of which are difficult to understand. Hence, most students tried to translate them into their first language. To certain extent, it is an effective method to learn English [8].

Cohen claimed that language learner strategy includes language learning strategy and language use strategy. Language learning strategy refers to students learning something new for the first time, whereas language use strategy refers to students using what they have learned. Most students studying abroad prefer using communication strategy which is part of the language use strategy because they have a second language social setting to help them enhance their language skills.

Each learner has a unique learning strategy, and there are no obvious distinctions among learners. Learning strategy can be used by lower-level English learning students [2]. In other words, practically everyone understands what a learning strategy is and how to use it throughout the learning process, but not everyone is a competent language learner. Therefore, a competent English learner must possess not only suitable learning strategies, but also the capability to self-monitor and self-regulate. In the context of TESOL, teachers' instruction is important, but students' flexible learning strategy and change are as significant. Teachers can assist students in adjusting to their learning, but the most important factor is the learners themselves.

There are a variety of distinct learning strategies from the standpoint of different skill areas, such as vocabulary strategy, reading strategy, and listening strategy, and so on [3]. Accumulating English

vocabulary is essential for English learning. By grouping English words into nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on, it is easier for learners to memorize them. In TESOL, pictures are used to reinforce students' memory when learning vocabulary. For instance, when the term "hibernation" is introduced, a vivid picture of a bear sleeping in a mountainous cave is shown. This helps learners learn vocabulary. By analyzing the structure and meaning of a word, students will be able to memorize vocabulary more quickly.

In terms of the listening strategy, Cohen suggested that students should aim to have more exposure to their second language [3]. By listening to a tape or watching a video, learners will be more familiar with the sound input. Listening is the foundation of communication. Therefore, learners are encouraged to listen to records or watch videos to familiarize themselves with English pronunciations. Other than that, some common but difficult pronunciations, requiring students to listening multiple times, should be emphasized. Listening strategy can be used when students watch television shows to develop their listening skills. Students are also encouraged to use the strategy outside the classroom.

The key to speaking is to practice like a native speaker. By asking more questions, students have more opportunities to practice speaking [3]. Chamot revealed that by watching their own speaking videos, learners can clearly see which parts of their performance require improvement [2]. In the context of TESOL, the students are asked to record videos of themselves speaking and then watch them. This is an effective method to improve pronunciation.

According to Cohen [4], learning strategy can be categorized by age. If the learners are young, they may not understand how to use the learning strategy in the learning process. Younger students need more instructions and monitoring. In the TESOL classroom, the students are adults; hence, they can learn how to use the strategy relatively quicker.

5. Digital technology

Kenning claimed that information and communications technology (ICT) is an effective method for English learning [8]. ICT, which usually assists students to obtain more information and learning materials, can be a useful platform in TESOL. Obviously, ICT offers many benefits, such as the availability of most language learning information, journals, reading materials, and other types of resources, to assist language learning activities at various levels and goals. Almost every learning activity necessitates the use of relevant videos, images, and news in the teaching process to improve the quality of the teaching process and attract the attention of learners. According to Kenning [8], the use of computer programs can improve an individual's English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), but television and radio do not. Therefore, computer applications have their own distinct advantages. Most English learners are now utilizing computers, iPads, and even mobile phones to expand their vocabulary, read, listen, and so forth [9].

Using digital technology does not signify a change in the methodology of language learning [8]. Digital technology is an advanced tool, and it cannot change the nature of learning a language. In the context of TESOL, perhaps the computer and internet have replaced printed textbooks and sound recorders, but the constituent of a language – vocabulary, grammar, reading skills, and pronunciation – are all still the same.

Tarsiero feels that there are various challenges that arise when students use the internet to learn a second language, and that resolving these issues is a challenge for teachers [9]. For instance, in distance-learning activity, students may be unprepared for the class and have limited opportunities to interact with each other. Due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, teachers cannot effectively assess students' learning. More monitoring is required, and teachers need to engage more with students. In the context of TESOL, at times, online discussions are held by teachers to improve the quality of English writing. The objective is for each student to complete a short summary of what they have learned during class. Technical issues as barriers of language learning might also influence the quality of English learning [9]. If a student spends a long time connecting to the internet or transferring files, the student's enthusiasm for English learning will

substantially diminish; thus, the importance of technical support cannot be overstated [10].

Convenience is one of advantages of digital technology in second language learning [9]. If a student has access to the internet, he or she can learn English anywhere and at any time. Some teachers prefer recording their teaching process for students to re-watch or re-listen to help them better understand a certain topic. However, when students do not focus on English knowledge points, but instead enjoy themselves by watching videos, this is a widespread problem in the language learning activity. Teachers have attempted to make their lessons more interesting but being "too humorous" is also associated with poor learning efficiency. Therefore, teachers need to strike a balance, which is not an easy task.

According to Xu and other researchers [10], there are now many English learning game applications in mobile phones that can attract students' attention. Teachers can use these game applications to improve English learning activity. For example, in the TESOL classroom, an English vocabulary game is usually played before the class begins. This activity is commonly seen among international students. The teacher intends to test whether the students have memorized certain vocabulary in a pleasant manner. This type of game makes studying more enjoyable and helps students improve their English vocabulary. Xu and other researchers asserted that vocabulary learning has distinct characteristics and that it is easy to design vocabulary games. Students may learn the spelling and sound of a word by listening to it and reading it. Vocabulary acquisition used to be limited to a single printed word book.

6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, there are several factors that can address the issues in TESOL. Motivation, learner autonomy, learning strategy, and digital technology provide different angles to solve the issues occurring in TESOL. Teachers should create a specific teaching plan with elements of encouragement and effective teaching skills to help improve students' language learning development.

Disclosure statement

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