

Formulating Model for Effective Teacher-Students Interaction in EFL Class Based on the Teachers' and Students' Expectations

(A Case Study at Batam Polytechnic)

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One of the most common problems faced by EFL teachers is passive classroom, where students tend to avoid interaction with teacher. In many cases, the students unresponsive manner always almost foils the teacher effort to have an effective interaction in the classroom such as asking questions to the class as a whole, expect at least one student to respond. This can be a frustrating experience for both parties. Obviously, there will be times when students cannot answer a teacher's question, but often students do not respond even if they understand the questions, know the answer, and able to answer. Furthermore, the students can often be very reluctant to give feedback or ask the teacher questions in front of the class. Thus the teacher got a little oral response.

Teachers generally expect that students will be able to use the target language during the lesson and be more demonstrative and more overtly communicative in their feedback. Teachers wait the students to ask questions, make comments or at least to respond with nods and shakes of the head, with sounds of agreement or sounds of understanding. Shortly, the teachers want the students to be both reactive and proactive. Yet, what they usually get is that most of the class members sit looking straight ahead using minimal facial expressions, gestures and verbal utterances. On the other hand, students commonly anticipate their teacher to be able to explain and clarify difficult problem. They also wait for the teacher correction on their mistakes. Yet, instead of receiving corrective feedback from the teacher, the students find that it seems the teacher tend to let the errors go uncorrected. Without understanding each other expectation it is likely that problem will arise in the student teacher interaction in the classroom.

There have been so many researches that touched the difficulty of the teacher-students interaction in EFL classes. Wadden and McGovern (1991) in Harmer (2001) related these problems to the students' behavior in which they are unwilling to speak in the target language (English). Harmer himself has found some other reasons for this unwillingness. One of them is the students' low self-esteem which may result part from the lack respect of the teachers and the peers. It is in line with other reasons found by Johns and Johns, those are; students' lack of confidence in their ability to express themselves, and in their ability to formulate ideas in English and to respond quickly in a discussion (in Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001). Dealing with this case in Indonesia context, Lengkanawati (2004) stated that even though many people now (since the reform movement) are not hesitant to speak up, this kind of behavior has not fully been reflected in the classroom interaction yet.

Some other researchers in Indonesia have also alluded on this problem. Putra (2004) has investigated the attitude of six students of Vocational High School of Telecommunication in Banjarbaru South Kalimantan in performing public speaking of English as a foreign language through English debate competition. Some of his "extensive findings" have identified that the students had got mental problems such a fright of making mistakes during the competition. Warliah (2004) did another research at SMU N 8 Bandung about students' reluctance to raise question in the classroom. And she has also found that most of the students do not raise questions in English classes because of being afraid of making mistakes. Moreover, her finding shows that the students want their teacher to be friendly, attentive and humorous. Fitri (2005) found other obstacles faced by the third-year students of English Department of UPI following the English speaking group work, they are; the lack of self-confidence and the lack of vocabulary.

Indeed, it has been some times that the teaching of English in Batam Polytechnic faces the students' low motivation. The class interaction is very minimum, since most of the students do not give active participations. The students' passiveness and unwillingness to interact in English foil the lecturers' attempts to build a good interaction between lecturer and students. Owing to this fact, the researcher was eager to seek what the students' and the lecturer's expectations on an effective lecturer-students interaction are and base on which then tried to arrange an effective formulation of lecturer-students interaction in EFL class.

METHOD

This study was descriptive and qualitative in nature since it focused on observing, interpreting, and understanding the collected data to find the students' and the lecturers' expectations about an ideal lecture-student interaction in English classes. Qualitative study in nature is conducted inductively, meaning that the study begins from data collected from the field and analyzed (Cresswell, 1984). Descriptive method, because this method was characterized by attempting to describe characteristics and events that exist (Kamil, 1985).

In qualitative research the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data collection play a very important role (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba 1985 as cited in Musthafa, 2000). In collecting the data the researcher applied observation, questionnaires and interviews. In order to enhance and maximize the trustworthiness of the research result, triangulation was applied, in which the researcher collected the data from both the students and the teacher. This reduced the risk that the conclusion would reflect only the systematic biases and it allowed to gain a better assessment. So, the researcher applied some strategy as follows:

1. Observation was firstly held in order to see how lecturer-students interactions happen in English classes.
2. Then, questionnaires were distributed to the student respondents to elicit their expectation on an effective lecturer-students interaction in English classes.
3. Finally, to elicit the lecturer expectations on an effective lecturer-students interaction in English classes and to confirm the data got from the questionnaires, interviewing the lecturers was undertaken

The inquiry was conducted at Batam Polytechnic. The researcher chose this university because it is one of the favorite universities is Batam and it was easy to access since the researcher has been working in this institution. The participants were the second semester of Batam Polytechnic students consisting of about 600 students in twenty classes. From those 600 participants, 100 students (16.67%) were selected randomly to become the respondents of the research. The other participants were three English lectures who teach in the second semester. Since the study was done in the context and situation of Batam Polytechnic, therefore the transferability of its findings would be limited to those locations that have necessary distinctiveness comparable to the context of Batam Polytechnic.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Having being collected, the researcher analyzed the data. He classified the data, and tried to eye on possible ideas, perceptions and experiences to categorize the students the students' and the lecturer's expectations on an effective lecturer-students interaction. Base on those expectations, he finally tried to arrange an effective formulation of lecturer-students interaction in EFL class as follows:

Mistakes are natural in a learning process – speak up!

Since some students realized that the limitation of their ability to interact with their lecture in English would probably result mistakes, they expected their lecture to willingly accept those mistakes that probably happen during the interaction. Moreover, the students also would like the lecturer to encourage their friend to do so that none would laugh or mock at those mistakes. These are some samples of what they wrote in the questionnaires due to this expectation:

R#05 *“I want to interact with the lecture in English, but I’m shy to be laughed by my friends when I make mistakes.”*

R#67: *“...the lecture encouraged us to interract in English, but when I made mistake, some friends laughed at me or even some mocked me.”*

R#02: *“I hope the lecturer can understand our weaknesses and mistakes in English and ask other friends not to laugh at those mistakes.”*

Yet, when this kind of students' expectation was confirmed to the lecturers, they said that students need not to be afraid of either making mistakes or being laughed by their friends, since making mistakes is quite natural in a language learning process. In fact, the lecturers even expected the students to keep interacting in English even though there are laughing at them. Below are the lecturer's opinions about this case:

T#1 : *“Why do they have to be afraid? Making mistakes is natural a language learning process.”*

T#2 : *“They don’t have to think about their friends who laugh at them. Yes, sometimes the mistake that they made was funny and it’s not easy to stop the class laughing at that mistake. But the mistake is not a sin that have to make them stop interacting in English.”*

T#3 : "I do understand about my students' limitation in vocabulary especially, in grammar and in other limitations, but their main problem is that they are shy. Instead of being shy, they have to be bold and creative to interact in English especially with their lecture"

Realizing their limitation in English skills, the students got afraid of making mistakes. Estimating the mistakes that they would probably made, they felt anxious about being laughed by their friends. They finally got nervous, anxious, shy, lazy, bored, and lack of self-confidence.

Harmer (2001) notes that a student's self-esteem is vitally important if effective learning is to take place. Harmer explains further that self-esteem may result partly from teacher approval, from a student's peers, or as a result of success. A lack of respect from teacher or peers can make students feel frustrated or upset.

Realizing the importance of doing the interaction in English with the lecturer, the students have to overcome these inhibitions. Referring to the seven hypotheses about good learners proposed by Rubin (1975) as reported by Johnson (2001) and Brown (1994), they should willing to appear foolish if reasonable communication results in the interaction. They should be willing to makes mistakes in order to learn and to communicate. And they should make their errors work for them, not against them.

To increase the student's self-esteem, it seems that the lecturers need to follow Harmer's advice to build rapport with the students which can be greatly enhanced by listening to what the students say with interest and by looking at the students when talking to them. Applying Brown's points (2001) in establishing this rapport is also worth. Those are; 1) showing interest in each students as a person, 2) giving feedback on each person's progress, 3) openly soliciting students' ideas and feeling, 5) laughing *with* them and not *at* them, 5) working *with* them as a team and not *against* them, and 6) developing a genuine sense of vicarious joy when they learn something or otherwise succeed. Applying this ways is supposed to create a relation that is built on trust and respect and that leads to students' feeling capable, competent and creative.

If you know a word, say it...!; If you've got two words, practice them...and so on...!

Since many respondents were impeded to interact in English with their lecture by their limitation in vocabularies, grammar, and pronunciation, some of the students expected their lecturer to teach them more on these weaknesses. Below are some of their expectations about this motion:

R#13: "The lecturer-students interaction should be in English, because by doing so will be familiar, but first the lecturer needs to be teach first the vocabularies to be used and also the pronunciation of difficult words."

R#24: "I agree if our interaction with lecturer should be in English, but in my opinion, lecturers should teach us first about the vocabularies used on the topics to be studied, so that when the lecturer ask question, we can get the ideas and express them in English. If we have the ideas and the vocabularies, even without being asked, we would willingly involve in the interaction."

R#60: "It's okay if the lecturer requires us to speak in English when interacting with him, and he must also keep teaching us more vocabularies and grammar as well."

The data shows that the students expected the lecturer to teach them vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar in order to enable them to interact with the lecturer. On the other hand, the three English lecturers interviewed said did not deny this inquiry but stressed that those limitations should have not been stop the students interacting in English. They need to practice those limited skills that they have got. Those are their answers in the interview:

T#1 : "Yes, their limited vocabularies and their low grammar made them get difficulty to express their though, but it must not have made them stop practicing. They have to struggle to go on and not easy to give up. "

T#2 : "The limitation should have not been the reason for avoiding the interaction. If they know only a word, practice that words, when they know two words, practice those two words...and so on...until they find themselves are able to do an English interaction."

T#3 : "...I know about my students' weaknesses, I realize that they are lacking of vocabulary. But their problem is that they never practice what they have got, they don't have to wait until having enough vocabularies or master grammar to interact in English. Their vocabularies will increase and their other skills will also progress, as they keep practicing to interact in English."

To have a clearer understanding about the students difficulty, we may refer to Harmer who stresses that the success in interaction depends on the knowledge of language features – connected speech, expressive devices, knowledge of lexis and grammar, and negotiation language, and the ability to process the language on the spot in which involved the retrieval of words and phrases from memory and their assembly into syntactically and propositionally appropriate sequences so that it comes out in forms that are not only comprehensible, but also convey the meaning that are intended (Harmer, 2001). Looking at this theory, it is understandable that with limited vocabularies stock in memory and insufficient grammar ability to assemble those words into proper orders, it will be very difficult for a speaker to convey his/her intentions. No wonder then, that the vocabularies and the grammar inadequacy are serious barriers in interacting in English with the lecturer. Due to these two problems, Wilkins once said "Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972).

On the other hand, even though Harmer admits that not all inaccuracies in pronunciation lead to ambiguity, but he also stresses that some sounds (for example /n/ in /sɪnɪn/ versus /n/ in /sɪnɪn/ have to be right if the speaker is to get their message across. Moreover, Wong (1987) points out that even when the non-native speakers' vocabulary and grammar are excellent, if their pronunciation falls below a certain threshold level, they are unable to communicate efficiently and effectively. Morley (1991) suggests that intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence and without adequate pronunciation skills, the learner's ability to communicate is severely limited. It can be understood then that the students' insufficient pronunciation skills is a significant obstacle for them to convey their senses in the interacting in English with their lecturer. It is then now clear to us that the students' limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation make them can not do much to respond their lecturer.

The students expectation on their lecturers to teach them more on those three skills actually shows that there is still a great desire to be able to interact with their lecturer in English. Firstly, they realized that to have that capability they need more vocabularies. The issue of a minimum adequate vocabulary for expressing practically any idea is still in a subject of debate. Some experts, such as West (1960) has published a list of 1,200 words based on a frequency count of the 2,000 most frequent words in English which he argued provided

learners with a 'minimum adequate speech vocabulary' (in Nunan, 2000). Lists such as West's, which are based on frequency counts, assume that teaching the vocabularies which are considered to be the most frequently to encounter as the most effective way. Nevertheless, Richards (1974) in Nunan (2000) reminded that the range of contexts in which the words are encountered, may also more important than frequency. Further he suggests that we may need differentiated vocabulary lists for different learner, and that the lists should reflect the communicative needs of the learners. What ever is the method, the students' expectation on their lecturers to teach them vocabulary on those three skills needs to be responded seriously, since vocabulary is a key aspect in order to become a proficient speaker (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Secondly, the students' expectation to be taught grammar need to be considered wisely. With the development of communicative approach along with theoretical and empirical insights from second language acquisition research, the place of grammar in the language classroom is currently rather uncertain (Nunan, 2000). However, Fotos (1994), Doughty and Williams (1998), and Brown (2001) sees that judicious attention to grammatical form in the adult classroom is not helpful, if appropriate techniques are used, but essential to a speedy learning process (in Brown, 2001). In line with them, Harmer (2002) reminded that if grammar rules are too carelessly violated, communication may suffer. Hence, there is no reason than to neglect the students' appeal to teach them grammar for the sake of their communicative skill. Yet, the question "how we teach grammar?" then is more appropriate than "do we need to teach grammar?" Brown (2001) proposed some appropriate techniques of teaching grammar for communicative purpose: 1) embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts, 2) contribute positively to communicative goals, 3) promote accuracy within fluent, communicative language, 4) do not overwhelm students with linguistic terminology, and 5) as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible.

Finally, the students' request to teach them pronunciation is also a proper plea. Harmer (2001) notices the some teacher get reluctant to teach this skill. Another query also appears on how good the students' pronunciation should be. Brown (2001) comments such question wisely:

Our goal as a teacher of English pronunciation should be more realistically focused on clear, comprehensible pronunciation. At the beginning level, we want learners to

surpass that threshold beneath which pronunciation detracts from their ability to communicate.

Then again for the of the students' communicative skill need, pronunciation needs to be taught with a practical goal, as Harmer (2001) points out that the student should be able to use pronunciation which is good enough for them to be always understood.

I'd willingly to speak in Indonesia on this case, but English only on that case please...!

Some of the students considered the lecturer should not teach fully in English as it is not easy for them to understand the fully English lecture explanation and question. Since the explanation and the question are not well understood, it is not easy for them to interact with or to answer the lecture question. In the questionnaires they wrote like this:

R#50: "I agree that we are required to speak English, but frankly to me it is still very difficult. We expect that when teaching, the lecture may not have to always use the English, but there are switch codes to Indonesian language, so that it can be understood."

R#68: "The interaction so far is pretty good, but sometimes the class atmosphere is so boring since it's too difficult to follow. How then can we interact and answers the lecturer question, if the explanation and also the questions given to us can not be understood?"

The lecturers, on the other hand, insist on using English as the model for the students:

T#1: "As we know that practice makes perfect, the student-lecturer should become a main part of that practice and that's why it should be in English. Both lecture and students should try their best and struggle to do the interaction in English, but you know what, when my students get difficulty in understanding my explanation in English, they seldom ask me any question. Some of them even do not pay any attention to me instead. But I think I have to keep using English in the class as a model for them. Because if I speak Indonesian, the students will feel comfortable to talk in Indonesian during the class."

The students' complaint about the way of lecturer teaching fully in English seems still relate closely to their low competences. Student limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, as have been revealed above, make them get difficulty in understanding the fully English lecturer's explanation.

The lecturer reason for using English in the class as a model for students is in line with Harbord (1992) who points out that the giving of instructions and many other teacher-students interaction are an ideal source of language for student acquisition. And the lecturer argument that if they speak Indonesian, the students will feel comfortable to talk in Indonesian during the class is lined up with (Harmer, 2001) who stresses that if the teacher does not speak English as much as possible in the class, the students will not see the need to speak much English either.

More recently however, attitudes to the use of the students' mother tongue have undergone a significant change. Davit Atkinson argued that it is not difficult to think of several advantages of judicious use of mother tongue, such as in difficult grammar explanations, checking comprehension, discussing classroom methodology, and checking for sense (Atkinson, 1987). And Harmer (2001) adds that as teachers we will try and insist on the use of English in language study and oral production activities, but more relaxed about pedagogic situation, though we will continue to encourage students to try to use it as often as possible.

Further more, Harmer (2001) propose some actions which the teachers can take to promote the use of English and explain clearly what is expected to the students:

Firstly, set clear guidelines: Student need to know when is permissible and when it is not. Part of the agreed code of conduct with a class will be just this understanding of when it is more or less "okay" and when it is more seriously counter-productive. Students need to be aware when English is absolutely essential. Some may think encouraging the use of the student-teacher interaction common in native English speaking counties is culturally arrogant. But if it is introduced in a sensitive and reasonable manner, it actually contributes to a more fulfilling English class. After all, most students do not study English just for linguistic competence. They will also want to develop sociolinguistic competence for communicating in different situations in English speaking countries, and this includes the classroom. The teacher then need to reminded the students of the "rules" at the beginning of each subsequent class and further encouraged them to become more active in the class when the instructor was talking.

Secondly, choose appropriate tasks: we should choose tasks which the students, at their level, are capable of doing in English. While there is nothing wrong in 'stretching' them with

challenging activities which engage them, it is clearly counter-productive to set them tasks they are unable to perform.

Next, create an English atmosphere: if we create an English environment, making English the classroom language as well as the language to be learnt, and perhaps even anglicising our students' names, then there will be more chance of the students making the classroom truly English themselves.

Lastly, use persuasion and other inducements: teachers all over the world spend a lot of their time going round to students, especially during speaking activities, saying things like, Please speak English! or Stop using Indonesia/Turkish/Arabic/Portuguese/Greek, etc. and it often works! If it does not, we can stop the activity and tell students there is a problem. This sometimes changes the atmosphere so that they go back to the activity with a new determination.

I'll ask more questions, but please be more active to answer!

Some other students expected the lecturer to ask more questions, since they thought that answering question is much easier than ask questions or initiating a conversation. Below are some of the student answers in the interview:

R#50: "It is not easy to interact in English with the lecturer, besides the English itself is difficult, to find the idea to be talked to is also not easy. But if the lecturer asks questions, the interaction will probably be more alive."

R#68: "Answering question is much easier than submitting our own ideas. Then if the lecturer asks more questions, we will get it more easily to interact with him."

R#68: "I wish that lecture ask us question, then we answer. It's much easier for us."

It seems that the students' expectation on their lecturer asking them more question was not exaggerated. The lecturers actually agreed with this kind of appeal, yet they also demanded a more active effort to answer those questions. Here are their opinion and wish about this issue:

T#1: "It's okay if I have to ask more questions, but the students also must give answers."

T#2: "Yes, asking questions is a good way to initiate interaction with the students. Actually I always do it in my class and I agree if the students expect me to ask them more questions, yet, they are also supposed to be more active to answer."

According to Brown (2001), one of the develop teacher role as an initiator and sustainer of interaction is to develop a repertoire questioning strategy. Brown also proposed some functions of appropriate questioning in an interactive classroom: 1) to give student impetus and opportunity to produce language comfortably without having to risk initiating language themselves, 2) to serve to initiate a chain of reaction of student interaction, 3) to give the instructor immediate feedback about student comprehension, and 4) to provide students with opportunities to find out what they think by hearing what they say.

In asking interactive questions, it is also probably helpful for the lecturer to refer to Brown's categories of question and typical classroom question words. Those are: 1) Knowledge Questions for eliciting factual answers, testing recall and recognition of information. Common question words for this category are: define, tell, list, identify, describe, select, name, point out, label, reproduce, Who? What? Where? When? Answer "yes" or "no"; 2) Comprehension Questions for interpreting and extrapolating. Common question words for this category are: state in your own words, explain, define, locate, select, indicate, summarize, outline, match; 3) Application Question for applying information heard or read to new situations. Common question words for this category are: demonstrate how, use the data to solve, illustrate how, show how, apply, construct, explain, What is... used for? What would result? What would happen? 4) Interference Question for forming conclusion that are not directly stated in instructional material. Common question words for this category are: how? Why? What did... mean by? What does... believe? What conclusion can we draw from...? 5) Analysis question for breaking down into parts and relating parts to the whole. Common question words for this category are: distinguish, diagram, chart, plan, deduce, arrange, separate, outline, classify, contrast, compare, differentiate, categorize, what is the relationship between? What is the function of? What motive? What conclusions? What is the main idea? 6) Synthesis Questions for combining elements into a new pattern. Common question words for this category are: compose, combine, estimate, invent, choose, hypothesize, build, solve, design, develop, what if? How would you test? What would you have done in this situation? What would happen if...? How can you improve? How else would you...? 7) Evaluation Questions for making a judgment of good and bad, right or wrong, according to some set of criteria, and stating why. Common question words for this category are: evaluate, rate, defend,

dispute, decide which, select, judge, grade, verify, choose why, which is best? Which is more important? Which do you think is more appropriate?

It's my pleasure to give correction, but how can I do it if you just keep silent?

Still closely related to the student's anxiety of making mistakes, some students waited for their lecturer willingness to give correction to their mistakes. The aspirations below are some of what they have written in the questionnaires:

R#13: "I wish that the lecturers are willing to make corrections if we have any errors in the English interaction."

R#24: "I think our lecture should give correction when we make mistake. But it seems that when some of my friends make mistake, my lecture tend to leave it. Then, we will never know what is correct and incorrect, right?"

R # 60: "When we make mistake, we must be gently corrected by the lecturer, so that we can improve it in the future"

The lecturers do not actually object to giving correction to the students' mistakes, yet they think that they have their own way of giving correction which is probably not understood by the students. Instead of waiting for corrections, the lecturers even suggested the students to practice English interaction more. Those are their answers in the interview:

T#1: "Actually I never intent to let my student do the mistakes, but I'm very cautious in giving correction since an inappropriate way of giving correction can result in as decline of motivation to the students themselves ."

T#2: "It's not the students, but us as the lecturers, who know how and when to give correction. It's better for them to think about fluency first rather than accuracy, and that's why, what they need is more practices."

T#3: "It's my pleasure to give correction, but how can I do it if the students just keep silent?"

It is true that most of the students expect the lecturer to give correction to their mistakes. Yet, the lecturer circumspection in giving the expected correction is not without reasons. Brown (2001) reminds that too much negative cognitive feedback – a barrage of interruptions, corrections, and overt attention to malformation – often leads learners to shut off their attempts at communication. On the other hand, too much positive cognitive feedback –

willingness of the teacher-hearer to let errors go uncorrected, to indicate understanding when understanding may not have occurred – serves to reinforce the errors of the speaker-learner. The result is the persistence, and perhaps the eventual fossilization, of such error.

To give correction wisely, Harmer (2001) divides the correction treatment into what he calls as feedback during accuracy work and feedback during fluency work. He proposed two techniques of giving feedback during accuracy work. Those are showing incorrectness and getting it right. Showing incorrectness can be done in a number of different ways such as asking the students to repeat what they have said with coupled of intonation and expression that something is not clear, echoing the what the student has said emphasizing the part of the utterance that was wrong, hinting for helping the students to activate rules they already know but which they have temporarily disobeyed (for example by say the word “tense” to make them think perhaps they should have used the past simple rather than the present perfect). Yet, if the students still unable themselves, we need to go to the “getting it right” step in which focus on the correct version in more detail. Giving feedback during fluency work can be done by either giving gentle direct correction or by recording the student mistakes to give a late correction by the end of the interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, the study comes to the following five formulations of effective lecturer-students interaction based on lecturers’ and students’ expectation, as follow: *First*, the student need not be afraid of making mistakes and the lecturer need to treat them a part of a natural learning process by giving a wise correction. *Second*, the students need to promptly start practicing what they have got and the lecture need to support the by teaching more vocabularies, grammar rules, and pronunciation. The lecture also needs to keep encouraging the students to try to use those as promptly and as often as possible. *Third*, students and lecturer need to agree on when to seriously commit on using English – such as in language study and oral production activities, and on when to be more relaxed – such as in certain pedagogic situations. *Fourth*, the lecturer needs to ask more questions for initiating and sustaining the interaction and the students need to be more active in answering the questions.

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