

Promoting Learner Autonomy in Teaching English to Young Adolescents through Higher Order Thinking Skills: An Innovation to Create 4.0 Learning Trends

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Abstract

Currently, 4.0 learning trends have been issued among English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers through selecting innovative learning strategies to fulfil 21st century goals, preparing students to be creative, collaborative, critical, and communicative as demanded in industrial revolution. One of the innovations is HOTS-based learning to promote EFL learner autonomy. However, the goals seem not to be optimally achieved. This paper presents the research findings relating to the implementation of HOTS to promote EFL learner autonomy. A Classroom Action Research was employed with two instruments to collect the data: classroom observation and interview. One class of eight graders and one English teacher were involved as the participants. The results reveal that Higher Order Thinking-based learning may accommodate EFL students to promote their autonomy since they were exposed to analyse and evaluate some cases which require them to do actions as decision makers and problem solvers. By doing so, the students could get knowledge and experience on how to be autonomous learners as indicated in their independence to propose their critical ideas and arguments. It is elaborated from the interview that their autonomy offers them to be well-literate in all skills mentioned in 4.0 learning trends, so that they are ready to compete in industrial revolution.

Keywords: 4.0 learning trends, Higher Order Thinking Skills, Learners Autonomy, Teaching English to Young Adolescents

Introduction

At present, the 4.0 learning trends have been issued amongst educators from different perspectives. Some of them concern on the learning strategies, the others pay attention in the content and subjects. Generally, 4.0 learning context aims to prepare students to be independent, collaborative, and good time manager in fulfilling the needs of the 21st century industry. In regard with this, the Indonesian government, in this case the Ministry of Education and Culture quickly respond to realize this learning targets by revising the 2013 Curriculum and implementing it (Suhardi, 2015).

HOTS as one of agendas stated in the 2013 Curriculum instead of literacy, character education, and 4C (collaborative, creative, communicative and critical) plays an important role to support the industrial revolution as mentioned in 4.0 learning context. It can be done through integrating HOTS in all subjects that prepares students to promote their own learning capacity, preference, strategy, and pose them to be independent learners (Fisk, 2017). There are some reasons underlying this policy, namely: (1) Higher Order Thinking Skills-based learning incorporates some skills, such as the ability to identify problems, compare one case into another, evaluate and solve a problem through strategic thinking; (2) Higher Order Thinking Skills trains students to be independent since it helps students to select the best options done through the process of analysis and evaluation; (3) Higher Order Thinking Skills provides an autonomy and opportunity for students since teachers only act as a facilitator who guides them during their learning process (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

In addition, Higher Order Thinking Skills is recognised as a learning strategy that contributes to the demands of 4.0 learning context. This is because it encourages students to think critically by considering the context and situation as well as determining the best strategy and attitude to solve the problems they face (Yen & Halili, 2015). According to King, et al (2015), Higher Order Thinking Skills focuses on several skills including identifying, comparing, analysing, evaluating, and determining some choices to deal with a problem, so it supports students to be problem solvers and responsible for their attitudes and choices. Further, those skills could be realized by the students in condition they understand some points, namely context, metacognition, comprehension, creativity, and procedural knowledge (King, et al, 2015). These elements should be trained and exposed by the teachers through various classroom activity so that the students gain exposures and experience which can be practiced in their social environment and interaction (Setyarini, 2016). Such social competence and independency concisely strengthen the students to fulfil the objectives of learning in 4.0 context which is directed to face industrial revolution.

However, referring to the findings from the study done by Setyarini (2016-2018), HOTS seems not to be integrated in the implementation of Curriculum 2013, particularly in teaching English to young adolescents for several reasons: (1) most of secondary English teachers do not understand the essential of HOTS, the reasons why HOTS, how to integrate it in EFL learning, and what should be gained by the students as the learning output; (2) for some teachers who have been exposed to HOTS, they just implemented the strategy intermittently, meaning that they do not consider HOTS as a lifestyle and integrate it in the classroom. This is in contrast with what Yen and Halili (2015) said that the exposures to Higher Order Thinking Skills should be frequently given so that the students may relate their experience and prior knowledge in solving their problem through analysing and evaluating the case they face; (3) the misleading in implementing HOTS is influenced by their belief of getting impossible condition to implement HOTS in EFL context. Consequently, this belief discouraged them to teach HOTS-based learning (Setyarini, 2018). Moreover, the implementation of this program is challenged by the new issue of 4.0 trends which often makes educators, especially teachers feel shocked. It is understandable because all teachers think that the issue is still beyond their head which necessary to be socialized and disseminated. The teachers admit that they still require further explanation and more exposures on how to teach students innovatively and creatively in order to face this challenge (Suherdi, 2015).

On the other hand, HOTS-based learning may promote learner autonomy for some benefits: (1) students are allowed to choose what they want to learn; (2) students can manage themselves on how to learn based on their preferences; (3) students analyse and evaluate what they have learned so that it is possible for them to pick some points to be implemented in their daily life. Also, this learning strategy supports the nine trends of 4.0 learning context as proposed by Fisk (2017), namely: learning can be taken place anytime anywhere, learning will be personalized to individual students, students have a choice in determining how they want to learn, students will be exposed to more project-based learning, students will be exposed to more hands-on learning through field experiences, students will be exposed to data interpretation in which they are required to apply their theoretical knowledge to numbers and use their reasoning skills to make inferences based on logic and trends from given sets of data, students will be assessed differently and the conventional platforms to assess students may be irrelevant or insufficient, students' opinion will be considered in designing and updating the curriculum, students will become more independent in their own learning so that teachers should assume a new role as facilitators who will guide the students through their learning process.

Therefore, the implementation of HOTS-based learning is believed as a successful strategy to facilitate to be independent learners who can set their own objectives and follow strategies devised by themselves to fulfil them. By doing so, they will be fully responsible with their own learning which lead them to understand deeper and better learning materials. Furthermore, learners' autonomy may facilitate the students to extend their knowledge and experience in applicable environment (Najeeb, 2013).

Method

A Classroom Action Research was occupied as a research design of this study with two cycles. Each cycle consists of four phases, namely *Planning phase*, *Acting phase*, *Observing phase*, and *Reflecting/Evaluating phase* (Kemmis& McTaggart, 1988 as cited in Malik &Hamied, 2014). In order to collect the data, two research instruments were used, such as: classroom observation and interview. The subjects involved in this study were one class of eight graders and one English teacher. In the interview, there were 5 students selected randomly to give their comments to the learning they joined while English teacher focused on their implementation of the learning model as well as the difficulties they faced. The collected data were analysed by referring the theory of learners' autonomy proposed by Najeeb (2013) and described according to 4.0 learning trends (Fisk, 2017) and principles of HOTS-based learning (Anderson &Krathwohl, 2001).

Results and Discussion

The following presents the findings of the study deal with promoting learners' autonomy through HOTS-based learning for teaching English to young adolescents in order to face 4.0 learning trends.

Table 1 Higher Order Thinking Skills in Cycle 1

No	HOTS Skills	Levels			NOTES
		Very Good	Good	Poor	
1	Comparing		√		
2	Evaluating			√	They are not yet exposed to analyse, evaluate, and create as an implication of HOTS-based learning.
3	Judging			√	The students do not have experience to do those activities since they were accustomed to do Lower Order Thinking by mentioning, remembering, etc. So, they feel shocked and strange.
4	Summarizing		√		
5	Criticizing			√	
6	Arguing		√		
7	Reasoning		√		
8	Creating/Doing			√	

Table 2 Higher Order Thinking Skills in Cycle 2

No	HOTS Skills	Levels			NOTES
		Very Good	Good	Poor	
1	Comparing	√			They started to be aware of doing analysis, evaluate and create something through comparing, judging, and reasoning. Although it is still in a simple case of their daily problems. Still show their doubts and they look unconfident. In certain familiar cases.
2	Evaluating	√			
3	Judging		√		
4	Summarizing	√			
5	Criticizing		√		
6	Arguing	√			
7	Reasoning		√		
8	Creating/Doing		√		

Table 3 Basic Pedagogical Principles of Learner Autonomy in Cycle 1

No	Basics Pedagogical Principles of Learner Autonomy	Levels			NOTES
		Highly promoted	Promoted	Less-promoted	
1	Learner involvement			√	Teacher-centred
2	Learner reflection		√		Give comment on teachers' performance
3	Appropriate use of target language			√	Most students got less opportunity to explore the class and get less experience in using the language
4	Collaborative		√		Even though still in a limited activity.

Table 4 Basic Pedagogical Principles of Learner Autonomy in Cycle 2

No	Basics Pedagogical Principles of Learner Autonomy	Levels			NOTES
		Highly promoted	Promoted	Less-promoted	
1	Learner involvement		√		Learner autonomy supposed to be gained under the teacher's guidance.
2	Learner reflection		√		
3	Appropriate use of target language		√		Students got more opportunity to work in groups and individual as they want to. Therefore, they tend to understand what they work collaboratively.
4	Collaborative	√			

Considering the findings presented in table 1 & 2, it is found that learner autonomy could be promoted through implementing HOTS although in different results. It is indicated from the improvement of progress gained by the students. From the first cycle, it clearly reveals that the students have shown their HOTS, although they are still in a good level, not in a very good one. In this case, they can compare problems identified in the classroom and their surroundings to get solutions based on their results of analysis and evaluation before doing an execution (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). By doing so, the students started to be aware of getting a solution of the problem, they need to do some activities (stages) by analysing, evaluating, and creating although among those activities some skills were required by identifying, judging, and criticizing. Dealing with the students' improvement, it can be investigated in the second cycle showing that the students generally promoted their HOTS in all levels although not in the highest ones. At least, the results demonstrated that what the students achieved and practiced clearly indicates that HOTS can promote learners' autonomy because they manage themselves independently by positioning their engagement and involvement in the classroom interaction (Najeeb, 2013).

In contrast, the second cycle shows some improvements due to promoting learners' autonomy indicated from some elements of being autonomous learners, namely learner involvement, learner reflection, appropriate use of target language, collaborative. Learner involvement in the second cycle

has been promoted well as indicated through the activities provided by the teacher in the learning process. Students were required to work in group by presenting their critical ideas to certain cases given by the teachers and it encouraged them to analyse, evaluate, and produce their arguments in a group. In addition, learner reflection in this second cycle was also improved as they could see the good points that they have learned from their English class. For example, once the teacher asked the students about what they have learned at that time, some of them elaborates that they have gained new knowledge compared than the previous meetings. Students also criticized the learning process that has been through by providing positive feedbacks which might be useful either for their peers or teacher. During the implementation of HOTS-based learning, the students were also using appropriate target language. It is indicated from the observation results showing that some of them spoke in English without hesitation and gave their critical comments in English. Once they were interviewed, the students admitted that they enjoyed the learning model implemented by the teacher because they were freer to give their comments in English without thinking about the grammatical error that possibly made. The students were also observed to work collaboratively either in a group or partner. They preferred to support their friends rather than to compete with one another. This is indicated from the activity in the learning process which showed that some students completed the arguments of their friends instead of finding mistakes of their friends' answers. It means that collaborative as one of the basic pedagogical principles in learner autonomy has been promoted by the teacher.

Conclusions

Referring to the results of data analysis, some points need to be concluded: First, HOTS-based teaching in English subject of young adolescent can accommodate the students to promote their learner autonomy. It can be seen from the way they view a case through giving comments, ideas, and arguments. Those could be exposed through comparing, evaluating, and deciding which one is the most suitable solution for them as problem solvers. Such learner autonomy is one of important components in 4.0 learning context which is indicated by the students' independency, self-regulated learners, decision makers, and problem solvers. Some improvement indicators of being autonomous learners can be seen from their active involvement in social activity, being collaborative, communicative, and critical to the environmental situation. This statement is also elaborated from the interview results that the students get more opportunity to set up themselves in selecting what should be learned, why they learn it and strategies to achieve the goals as stated in 4.0 learning trends. This exposure offered some experiences not only in positioning themselves as independent learners, but also acquiring the EFL skills. Therefore, the students tend to show their collaborative performance and involvement during the classroom activity.

The second result presents that implementing HOTS was recognized as a challenging strategy for the teachers. This is due to the knowledge and experience of the teachers in teaching EFL based on HOTS. Such situation encourages the teacher to be more innovative and motivated to share their willingness in creating the students' independency and being autonomous. This elaboration proves clearly that HOTS accommodate the students to achieve their learning goals as described in 4.0 context which require the students to decide their own target.

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