

The Students of International Physics Class at UNP: How Do They Acquire English?

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Abstract

In 2017, Universitas Negeri Padang opened its first international class in 15 study programs spread across 8 faculties within the university. The international class referred to here is a class where the academic community including lecturers and students use an international language, namely English, in the teaching and learning process. From a preliminary research, it was found that the English skills of the international class students of the Physics Education Study Program 2018 were very good. This research aims at finding out how these students acquired their English skills. Their efforts as well as any factors that support and hinder them during the acquisition process were analyzed. The results of data analysis showed that: 1) the most used effort to acquire English language skills done by these students is listening to English songs and films, 2) They listen to songs and watch English films by using the media and the resources available around them, 3) the factor that supports them in acquiring English is the interaction between them and people around them in English, and 4) the factors which inhibits them are the lack of self-motivation and negative views from people around them when they practice their English. The results of this study are very useful for lecturers to be used or applied in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: *language acquisition, international class*

Introduction

In 2018, Universitas Negeri Padang opened 15 international classes in 8 faculties within the university. Quoted from the university's official website, Prof. Ganefri, Ph.D as the Chancellor explained that the purpose of opening those international classes is one of the ways of the university to improve the quality of its graduates. It is hoped that with this international class, the graduates of Universitas Negeri Padang will have good foreign language skills and be able to compete with other university graduates in the free market era. It was also said that improving the quality of the graduates of Universitas Negeri Padang would later help the university in its efforts to achieve its vision to become the excellent university in Southeast Asia in 2020.

International classes at Universitas Negeri Padang are run using English. All activities in the teaching and learning process are given by lecturers and run by students using English as a communication tool. The teaching strategies of the lecturers, the delivery of teaching materials, the use of textbooks, and all activities in the classroom and outside of the classroom use English. Prof. Yunia Wardi, as the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of Universitas Negeri Padang in the official website, also mentioned that not only during the teaching and learning process, even these international class students are given special trainings such as leadership training, cross cultural management training, special certification and exchange programs with universities abroad.

From this explanation, it can be seen that the course of the international class at Universitas Negeri Padang is closely related to the English skills of the students. Students enrolled in the international classes are students who are considered to have good English skills. In fact, these students have been screened in advance to be declared as members of the international class. This screening is done by giving them a test. The tests given are a written test and an interview test which are both conducted using English.

Based on preliminary observations made by the researchers toward the international class students who came from the Physics Education study program in 2018 in the MKU English class, it can be seen that the English language skills of these international class students can be classified to be good. Even, some of them are very good and very fluent in English. When they were assigned to read in English, their pronunciation was good and precise. Likewise, later on, when they were asked to answer questions related to the reading, they were able to answer almost all of the questions correctly.

A pre-test was held for 100 MKU English students. From the analysis of the answers provided, it was found that the scores of the 2018 International Physics students were the highest. Even, some of them got perfect scores in the pre-test. Their good English skills are further reflected in the speaking activities. The speaking ability of the international class students is very well proven by their fluency when they were asked to make a

brief conversation with their friends and then demonstrate what they had made in front of the class. Their conversation ran naturally like native speakers even with the addition of gestures.

Based on these observations, it is concluded that indeed these students have good English skills and deserve to be members of the international class in their study program. The question now is how they acquired English so far. This research aims at determining the efforts to obtain English language skills by the international class students in the Physics Education study program. What they have done and how they have applied it so that they can successfully improve their English skills will be viewed and analyzed. Not only that, the factors that support and hinder them in improving their English skills will also be explained. These four things are analyzed with the aim of finding out the most appropriate acquisition of English language abilities that can later be applied to students, especially in the MKU English classes. As stated by Kher and Rani (2019), the classes of MKU are not only big but also diverse that they lead to problems later. The lecturers of English MKU at UNP have to be able to find out effective teaching and learning strategies.

For that matter, the theory of language acquisition becomes the main topic of discussion in this article. One well-known language acquisition theory is the Second Language Acquisition theory introduced by Brown (2002). In this theory, Brown explains that there are five hypotheses of language acquisition that occur in humans. They are:

1. The acquisition learning hypothesis: in this hypothesis, it is said that humans learn about the language system below their consciousness. They also rely on their intuition in learning languages.
2. The monitor hypothesis: in this hypothesis, humans learn languages by continuously monitoring their own development. They keep trying to develop their abilities based on what they have learned before.
3. The natural order hypothesis: in this hypothesis, it is said that humans gain an understanding of the rules of language in unpredictable ways.
4. The input hypothesis: in this hypothesis, it is said that humans understand language far beyond their own consciousness as long as there is something that can influence them. One of the most important influences for them to understand language is motivation.
5. The affective filter hypothesis: this hypothesis states that the positive attitude is the most important aspect in language acquisition. When people are emotionally stable, they can easily understand a language.

Another expert, Oxford in Murat (2000) also has his own language acquisition theory. According to him, there are two ways or strategies used by humans in their efforts to obtain a language. The first is called Direct Strategies. This strategy includes three steps. They are Memory, Cognitive, and Compensation strategies. The second strategy is called Indirect Strategies. This strategy also includes three stages, namely: Metacognitive Strategies, Affective Strategies, and Social Strategies.

Another linguist, Stern in Murat (2000) also explained the theory of language acquisition. According to him, there are five strategies carried out. The first is the management and planning strategies. This is done in four steps:

1. Decide what commitment to make to language learning
2. set himself reasonable goals
3. decide on an appropriate methodology, select appropriate resources, and monitor progress,
4. evaluate his achievements in the light of previously determined goals and expectations

The second strategy is called cognitive strategy. There are six steps that can be done in this strategy. They are:

1. Clarification / Verification
2. Guessing / Inductive Inference
3. Deductive Reasoning
4. Practice
5. Memorization
6. Monitoring

The third strategy is the communicative-experiential strategy. This strategy indicates body language and repetition in the language acquisition. The fourth strategy is an interpersonal strategy that requires communication between language learners and the original speaker. In this strategy, language learners must also begin to familiarize themselves with the culture of the language they are learning. The last strategy is an affective strategy that requires a language learner to foster a positive attitude towards the foreign language they are learning and the learning activities they are going through.

Someone's success in the language acquisition process is influenced by several factors. Stefansson et al (2013) states the success of a person's language acquisition is not influenced by his age. According to him, there are two factors that influence the success of one's language acquisition. These two factors are motivation and the proximity to the language itself. If that person is farther away from the language, he will never be able to master the language. Another expert, Munoz, said that although age does not significantly affect someone's success in

obtaining a language, however, the earlier they learn it, the better their abilities. It takes a maximum of ten years for a person to continue to get closer to the language he is learning.

In this article, the factors that influence someone's success in the language acquisition process are based on Castello (2015). He mentions four factors including:

1. Input: the input of the language that is heard or received by the language learners
2. Interaction: the interaction with parents and those around him in practicing language will have a positive effect on one's language skills
3. Environment: the natural interaction, the atmosphere of the classroom, or the communicative learning environment
4. Motivation: the social, cultural, or economic ideals can be a supporting factor for someone in learning languages

Method

This descriptive qualitative research design was chosen with the aim to describe in detail the efforts to obtain English proficiency which have been applied by international class students of the 2018 Physics Education study program at Universitas Negeri Padang. All English learning activities that they have implemented previously will be explained. Not only these acquisition efforts, the inhibiting and supporting factors will also be explained. Hopefully, all of these findings will help the MKU English lecturers later in choosing the right learning model for the MKU students.

The instruments used in this study were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was used to find out the efforts and factors influencing the success of the international class students in acquiring and improving their English skills. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with students in order to obtain in-depth information. The questions in the interview are based on questions that are less able to be clearly illustrated in the questionnaire and additional questions that will provide more information for this article. Questionnaires and questions in the interview were first be validated by two English Department lecturers to test the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Data from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed by means of data reduction. What is meant by data reduction is data simplification which is done by selecting and focusing the data so that it eventually becomes meaningful information. In analyzing the qualitative data, all theories in the literature review become the foundation. Researchers are assisted by a data processor in analyzing research data.

Results and Discussion

Based on the data analysis, it is found that:

1. The acquisition efforts undertaken by International Class students in the Physics Education Study Program in 2018 are:
 - Listening to conversations/songs in English
 - Practicing speaking skills in English
 - Reading English books and novels
 - Writing in English
 - Learning English in school
 - Taking English courses
 - Memorizing English Vocabularies
2. They implemented each of these English language acquisition efforts by:
 - Listening to conversations/songs in English
The first way those students do is to listen to songs in English. When they listen to the song, they pay attention to the pronunciation and pay close attention to the song's lyrics. Thus, not only did their pronunciation improve, but their vocabulary also enriched.
The second way they do is by watching movies/Youtube videos/learning tutorial videos in English. They try to find out the conversation used in the film/video. The conversations and sentences that they find are later used in their daily communication.
 - Practicing speaking skills in English
The way that the students do is by talking to themselves in front of a mirror in English, talking to classmates in English, and talking to foreign tourists in English. They practice their communication skills in their daily lives.
 - Reading English books and novels
International Physics Education class students use English reading materials as an effort to acquire their English language skills. English novels and compulsory textbooks become their reading materials in learning English. By reading these, their English vocabulary enriches and is useful in their communication later.
 - Writing in English

The students of the International Physics Education class also make writing as their effort in acquiring English skills. They write poetry and diaries in English. This helps them to be able to compose good sentences in English. This effort also helps them to be able to write better and better since it is not an easy task to write in English especially grabbing the gist of the reading resources they read. Kher and Rani (2019) state the inability of students to obtain the main point of their reading into their writing. This effort will be very useful for them later.

- Learning English in school

Learning English from the teachers in school is also an effort to acquire English abilities. The way their teachers teach and educate them makes their abilities in English improve. The understanding they got from the teacher makes their English skills better.

- Taking English courses

Taking English courses is also an effort to acquire English language skills for some of the 2018 International Physics Education students of UNP. The learning they get from the tutors is as important in their efforts to acquire and improve their abilities as what they get from their teachers at school.

- Memorizing English Vocabularies

Some students very creatively noted the new vocabulary they found in their daily lives. Then they look up the vocabulary in the English dictionary. After that, they memorize the vocabulary and they use it in their daily communication.

All of these acquisition efforts have actually referred to what were intended by Brown (2002), Oxford in Murat (2000), and Stern in Murat (2000) in their language acquisition theories. According to those three experts, the language acquisition can be done consciously or not, directly to oneself or through people around by involving all aspects that exist in a person including cognitive, motivation, and even a positive attitude towards the foreign language. This is in line with what has been run by the students.

3. Factors that support their success in implementing those English language acquisition efforts are:

- Sufficient language input
- Interaction with people around practicing English
- A great learning atmosphere
- Motivation

Those supporting factors are in accordance with the factors according to Castello (2015). Based on the results of the research, it is found that the most supportive factor out of the 4 factors is the interaction with people around in practicing language skills. This is because the more frequently their English is used; they will get used to and become more fluent in English.

4. The inhibiting factor in the effort to acquire English language abilities felt by the students of the International Physics Education 2018 class is the lack of motivation from within themselves. In addition, the lack of support from parents and mocks from people around them also make their motivation lessen.

Conclusions

1. The mostly used effort to obtain English skills by the students is listening to the conversations/songs in English.
2. They listen to songs and watch English films by using existing media and available sources around them
3. The factor that most supports them in obtaining English is the interaction factor in practicing English.
4. Factors that inhibit the students from acquiring English skills are lack of motivation both in themselves and from those around them.

Acknowledgments

The research was supported by the Research and Community Service Center (LP2M) of Universitas Negeri Padang. We thank our colleagues from English Language and Literature Department of UNP for their help and advice assisting the research.

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